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YVETTE

Stories by Guy de Maupassant
Translated by Marjorie Laurie
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BOULE DE SUIF
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NOTRE CŒUR

YVETTE

By

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Translated by

MARJORIE LAURIE

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I. YVETTE

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YVETTE

I

"Do you mind walking?" said Jean de Servigny to Léon Saval as they came out of the Café Riche. "It is too fine to take a cab."

"Just as you please," answered his friend.

"It's hardly eleven; we shall be there before midnight; we needn't hurry."

The boulevards were swarming with the gay throngs, full of the joy of life, which emerge on summer nights, coming and going, drinking and chatting, flowing like a stream. Here and there the brilliant light of a café fell on groups sitting round small tables which, covered with bottles and glasses, blocked the pavement in a closely set array. Cabs with red or blue lights, like the eyes of animals, passed up and down the road at a smart trot, the brilliantly illuminated shop fronts showing up the silhouette of the bony hack, of the driver on the box and the sombre body of the vehicle. The cabs of the Urbaine, as the gleams fell on their yellow panels, made vivid splashes of colour.

Cigar in mouth, the two friends strolled along at a leisurely pace. They were in evening dress, their light overcoats on their arms, flowers in their buttonholes, their hats at a rakish angle, a testimony alike to the excellence of their dinner and to the warmth of the evening. The pair had been close and devoted friends ever since their school days.

Short, slender, somewhat fragile looking, slightly bald, well turned out, with pointed moustaches, well cut lips

and bright eyes, Jean de Servigny was one of those men of nocturnal habits, who seem to have been born and bred on the boulevards. In spite of his habitual air of exhaustion and his pale complexion, he was indefatigable and full of vitality, one of those wiry Parisians, who owe their artificial, nervous energy to gymnasium, fencing school, Turkish baths and douches. Famous for his escapades, as well as for his wit, his wealth, his family, his social gifts, his charm, and his polished manners, he was a typical Parisian, volatile, cynical, fickle, impulsive, energetic, irresolute, capable of anything, accomplishing nothing, an egoist on principle, yet spasmodically generous, spending his income with discretion, and pursuing his pleasures with due caution. Now cold, now impassioned, carried away by the impulse of the moment, but speedily recovering himself, the victim of conflicting emotions, yielding to every caprice, in logical adherence to his weathercock creed of philosophy, the sport of every wind that blew, he took advantage of every favourable chance without ever troubling to create his own opportunities.

His companion, Léon Saval, like himself a man of means, was one of those magnificent giants, whom women in the streets turn to admire. He looked like a statue come to life, an ideal type of manhood, a model fit for the gallery of an exhibition. Unduly handsome, unduly tall, unduly robust and strong, his defect was an almost exaggerated perfection. He was the hero of countless love affairs.

"Did you tell our hostess that you were going to bring me?" he asked as they passed the Vaudeville.

Servigny laughed.

"Tell her? Tell the Marquise Obardi? Do you warn a bus driver that you propose to board his vehicle at the next street corner?"

"Why, what sort of a person is she?" asked Saval, somewhat puzzled.

"A parvenue," answered his friend, "an adventuress,

a minx, though a delightful one, sprung from heaven knows where. She made her appearance one day, God knows how, in the demi-monde, where she cuts a striking figure. But what does it matter? They say that her real name, her maiden name, for a maid she has remained in every respect but that of innocence, is Octavia Bardin; hence Obardi, keeping the first letter of her Christian name and dropping the last letter of her surname. All the same, she is a charming woman, and she will certainly take you for her lover because of your physical attractions. Hercules is not brought into Messalina's palace without something coming of it. I may add that though her house is like a bazaar, where there is no charge for admission, you are under no obligation to buy her wares, which consist of cards and love. There is no compulsion. You are as free to go as to come.

"For the last three years she has set up in the shady quarter of l'Etoile, and keeps open house for the riff-raff of every country, who come to Paris to practise their divers dangerous and rascally arts. I hardly remember how I found my way to her house. Like the rest of us, I drifted thither for the sake of the gambling and because all the women one meets there are fair game, just as all the men are sharpers. They have a fascination for me, the whole crew of adventurers glittering with orders, every one of them a foreign nobleman with a romantic title—all, however, quite unknown to their respective embassies, except those who happen to be spies. They brag of their honour in season and out of season; they are always dragging in their ancestors and relating the story of their lives on the slightest provocation. They are braggarts, liars, cheats to a man, as dangerous as their packs of cards, as false as their names. But they are not without a certain courage, because a robber cannot plunder his victims without risking his own neck. In a word, they are the aristocracy of the criminal classes. Personally I delight in them. They are interesting to know and analyse. Their conversation is amusing and

often witty, never commonplace like the talk of our French civil servants. All the women are pretty with just a hint of exotic coquetry, of a dim, mysterious past, half of which, perhaps, was spent in the penitentiary. Most of them have fine eyes and splendid hair, their physical stock-in-trade, and they diffuse an intoxicating charm, a fascination which drives a man distracted, a seduction at once morbid and irresistible. They are the good old-fashioned type of siren, rapacious and vampire-like. I dote on them. The Marquise Obardi is typical. She is the classic example of these captivating hussies. Mature yet beautiful, a fascinating pantheress, she is obviously corrupt to the marrow of her bones. But her parties are very amusing; you can dance and gamble and sup; in fact there is every social attraction."

"Are you her lover?" asked Saval. "Or have you ever been?"

"No. Neither past, present or future," replied Servigny. "I go there chiefly for the sake of her daughter."

"Ah! she has a daughter?"

"Has she a daughter? A marvel, my dear fellow. Nowadays she is the principal attraction to her mother's den. Tall, beautifully made, at the very perfection of development, as fair as her mother is dark, full of joy and fun, always laughing, and mad on dancing. Who will be her lover? Has she ever had a lover? No one knows. But there are a dozen of us who live in hope. In the hands of a woman like the Marquise, such a daughter is a fortune in herself. The two of them play a close game. No one can quite make them out. Perhaps they are waiting for a better opportunity—than I present. But I assure you I shall seize my chance if it ever arises. This girl ,Yvette, I tell you, completely baffles me. She is a mystery. Unless she is a perfect prodigy of astuteness and perversion, she is certainly the most astounding miracle of ingenuousness ever known. She lives amidst these vicious surroundings with tranquil and triumphant assurance, exquisitely corrupt or exquisitely innocent.

Surprising offshoot of a wanton, rising out of her squalid world like a splendid flower on a dunghill! She may be the child of a man of high lineage, of some great artist or great noble, of some prince or king, who chanced one night to lie in her mother's arms. You can no more fathom her origin than her thoughts. But you shall see her."

"You are in love with her," laughed Saval.

"No, I have merely entered the lists, which is not the same thing. I will show you my most formidable rivals. But my chances are good. I was first in the field and I am regarded with some favour."

"You are in love," Saval insisted.

"No. But she disturbs me and allures me; and makes me restless; she attracts and frightens me. I distrust her as I would a trap, yet I long for her as a thirsty man longs for a cool drink. I am conscious of her charm, yet I never go near her without being on my guard, as if in the presence of a skilful pickpocket. When I am with her, I feel a quite illogical yearning for her hypothetical innocence and at the same time a thoroughly reasonable mistrust of her not less probable guile. I realise that I am confronted with an abnormal being, and whether she be exquisite or abominable, I cannot tell."

"I assure you you're in love," said Saval for the third time. "You celebrate her charms with the enthusiasm of a poet, with the lyric touch of a troubadour. Come, analyse your feelings and own up."

Servigny walked on a few paces before answering:—

"O, well, you may be right. She has certainly captured my imagination. Yes, perhaps I am in love. I think of her more than is good for me. She is my last thought as I fall asleep and my first when I wake up. It is really serious. Her image pursues me, it is always with me, it hovers before my eyes; it is around me and within. Can this physical obsession be love? Her face is so deeply stamped upon my vision that I see it as soon as I close my eyes. I can't deny that my heart beats faster whenever I

see her. I do love her, but in a curious way. I desire her passionately, yet the idea of marrying her seems to me a monstrous absurdity. I am a little afraid of her, too, with the fear of a bird for the hovering hawk. I am jealous of her, too, jealous of all the secrets within that unfathomable heart. Is she just a charming little schoolgirl, I wonder, or a complete fraud? She says things that would make a barrack-room blush; but so does a parrot. Sometimes, she is so reckless, or is it shameless? that I cannot but believe in her spotless purity. At other times she seems so preposterously, so incredibly innocent, that I wonder whether she can ever have been chaste. She excites and provokes me like a courtesan and at the same time is as chary of herself as a virgin. She seems at once to love me and to laugh at me; in public she takes possession of me as if she were my mistress, in private she treats me as if I were her brother or her servant. Sometimes I credit her with as many lovers as her mother. Sometimes I believe she knows absolutely nothing of the realities of life.

"Another thing. She is a voracious reader of novels. Until something better turns up, I do myself the honour of supplying her with books. She calls me her librarian. I have given the Librairie Nouvelle a standing order to send her every book that comes out in the course of the week and I believe she reads the whole lot indiscriminately. The result must be a curious tangle inside her head. All that undigested literature may perhaps furnish a clue to the girl's singular behaviour. When one looks upon life through the medium of countless novels, one must see it in a strange light and gain a weird idea of things in general. Well, I shall bide my time. Certainly I have never had such a fancy for any other woman. But it is equally certain that I shall never marry her. So if she has had lovers, I shall add one more to the list. If not, I shall take ticket N° 1 in the omnibus. The case is clear. She can never marry. For who would marry the daughter of the Marquise Obardi; that is to say, of

Octavia Bardin? Nobody, and that for many reasons. Where could she hope to find a husband? In society? Never. The mother's house is an improper place of resort, where the daughter is the chief attraction. Men do not marry a girl like that. In the middle classes? Even less. Besides the Marquise is not the woman to make a bad bargain. She would never give up Yvette except to a man of high position; and she won't catch one. Among the lower orders? Less than ever. There's no way out. The girl does not belong to the upper classes, nor to the middle classes, nor to the people. She cannot marry into any one of these social categories. By descent, by birth, education, training, by her ways and manners, she belongs to the gilded demi-monde. She can't get away from it, except by becoming a nun, which does not seem very likely, when her tastes and mode of life are considered. There is only one career open to her —that of the courtesan. She will come to it, if she does not practise the trade already. She cannot escape her fate. From an innocent girl, she will become everybody's girl. I should like to be the turning point in the transformation. So I bide my time. There are many aspirants. You will see Monsieur de Belvigne, a Frenchman; Prince Kravalow, a Russian; the chevalier Valreali, an Italian; these have openly entered the lists and are manœuvring for place. Many freebooters of less consequence are prowling round her. The Marquise keeps on the alert. I think she has designs on me. She knows I am wealthy and she has less hold over the others. Her salon is the most remarkable of its kind known to me. Even men of good standing frequent it. Witness ourselves, and we shall not be the only ones. As for the pretty ladies, who empty your pocket, she has found, or rather, she has selected, the pick of the bunch. Heaven alone knows where she unearthed them. Hers is a world that exists side by side with the criminal world and the Bohemian world; it is on a plane of its own.

"By a stroke of genius she has made a point of choos-

ing adventuresses with children, especially daughters. So that a greenhorn might think himself among respectable women."

They reached the avenue of the Champs-Elysées. A light breeze stirred the leaves and passed caressingly over their faces, like the flutter of a giant fan waving across the sky. Shadowy forms wandered noiselessly beneath the trees; or sat about on the benches, where they showed up like patches of darkness. They spoke in whispers, as if revealing important or shameful secrets.

"You can't imagine," Servigny went on, "what a collection of fantastic titles you come across in that den of hers. Which reminds me that I must present you as Count Saval; plain Saval, without a title, would never do."

"Oh, come, none of that," his friend protested; "I should hate anyone to think, even for one evening and among that rabble, that I could be absurd enough to rig myself out with a title. I won't have it."

"Don't be silly," said Servigny, laughing. "Why, they have dubbed me Duke de Servigny—how or why I neither know nor care. But there it is. I am, once and for all, Duke de Servigny. I neither complain nor protest. If it weren't for my title, I should be frightfully looked down upon."

But Saval was not to be persuaded.

"It's all very well for you. You really have a title, so it doesn't matter. If I am the only commoner in the room, so much the better. It will be my claim to distinction and superiority."

"I tell you it's impossible," Servigny persisted. "Absolutely impossible. It would be simply outrageous. You would be like a ragpicker in a congress of emperors. Leave it to me. I will present you as Viceroy of Upper Mississippi, and no one will move an eyelid. When one assumes greatness, one cannot pitch it too strong."

"No; I tell you again, I won't have it."

"Never mind. I was a fool to argue with you. I defy

you to enter without being decorated with a title, just as at certain shops ladies are presented with a bunch of violets at the door."

They turned to the right down the Rue du Berri, and entered a fine, modern house. They ascended to the first story, where they handed their overcoats and sticks to four lackeys in knee breeches. There was an atmosphere of gaiety, and the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers and of dainty raiment. A confused and continuous murmur of voices proceeded from the adjoining rooms, which seemed to be full of people. A solemn butler, tall, pompous, white-whiskered, approached the newcomers and with a haughty bow, asked:

"Whom shall I announce?"

"Monsieur Saval," answered Servigny.

Throwing open the door, the man announced to the assembly in a ringing voice:

"The Duke de Servigny and Baron Saval."

The first drawing-room was full of women. As the two men entered, they received an impression of white arms and bosoms, emerging from flowing draperies of vivid hues.

The hostess, who was standing in conversation with three other women, turned and advanced majestically towards them, with smiling lips and gracious bearing. Her low, narrow forehead was crowned by a mass of lustrous black hair which encroached upon her temples. She was tall, rather full in figure and a thought too mature. But for all that she was remarkably handsome in a massive, voluptuous and commanding way. Under the coronet of hair, which rendered her mysteriously alluring and set men smiling and dreaming, shone great black eyes. Her nose was rather narrow; her mouth, large but infinitely seductive, seemed shaped for ravishing discourse. Her voice was her greatest charm. It bubbled up like water from a spring, so deliciously natural, so clear, so ringing, so exquisitely pitched that it was a joy to hear. The ear was charmed by that rippling speech,

flowing like a brook, while the sight rejoiced in those lovely lips, a little too red perhaps, which parted to give her words utterance.

She held out one hand to Servigny, who kissed it, and dropping her fan, which hung by a chain of wrought gold, she gave the other hand to Saval:

"Welcome, Baron," she said, "all the Duke's friends are at home here."

She fixed her brilliant eyes on the giant of a man, who had just been presented to her. On her upper lip there was a faint black down which was more noticeable when she spoke. A delicious scent hung about her, aromatic and heavy, an exotic perfume from America or the Indies.

Other guests arrived, marquises, counts and princes to a man.

"You'll find my daughter in the other room," she said to Servigny with maternal fondness. "I hope you will enjoy yourselves, and make yourselves at home."

As she left them to receive other visitors, who had just arrived, she cast on Saval the fugitive smiling glance with which a woman hints that a man has found favour.

Servigny took his friend's arm.

"Let me be your guide. This room where the ladies congregate, is the temple of Beauty, blooming or otherwise. Secondhand wares as good as new, or even better, and highly priced, are to be had on short or long lease. On the left is the card room, the temple of Mammon. You know all about that. At the far end is the ball room, the sanctuary, the temple of Innocence, in other words, the mart where the young girls are displayed. Here the progeny of these ladies may be viewed from every aspect. These girls represent the future; they are the hope— of our nights. But even lawful unions are acceptable. That is the most curious section of this museum of moral anatomy. All these little girls have souls which are dislocated, like the limbs of baby clowns in families of acrobats."

He bowed politely to left and right, bestowing a compliment here and there, appraising with the sharp eye of a connoisseur the white shoulders of every woman he saw.

At the far end of the ball room, the band was playing a waltz, and the two men paused on the threshold to look on. A dozen couples were dancing, the men with solemn faces, the girls with a fixed smile upon their lips. Like their mothers, they showed a generous expanse of bare bosom, and instead of sleeves, some of them had only narrow shoulder straps to their bodices. All of a sudden, a tall girl, looping up her voluminous train with her left hand, darted across the room, elbowing the dancers out of her way. She tripped along with the short, quick steps of a woman hurrying through a crowd.

"Oh, there's my Muscade," she cried. "Good evening, Muscade."

Her face was radiant with the joy of life and the glow of happiness. Her skin had the warm, creamy pallor that accompanies red hair. Her locks, a wealth of flaming auburn, were coiled on the top of her head. They drooped over her brow and seemed to weigh down her graceful, girlishly slender neck.

Just as the mother's charm lay in her voice, so the daughter's chief attraction was her grace of movement. So natural, fine and unaffected were her gestures, that it was a mental joy, a physical rapture, to watch her walk, bend her head, or raise her arm.

"Hullo, Muscade; good-evening, Muscade," she called out again.

Servigny shook hands as heartily as if she were a man, and introduced his friend:—

"Mam'zelle Yvette, Baron Saval."

She bowed to the stranger, and looked him up and down.

"Good-evening, Baron. Are you always as large as that?"

Servigny answered in the bantering tones wherewith

he invariably sought to conceal his doubt and distrust of her.

"No, mam'zelle. He is looking his biggest this evening to please your Mamma, who likes them large."

"That's all right," said the girl, with affected gravity, "but when you come to see me, please reduce your dimensions a little. I prefer people of moderate proportions. Muscade, for instance, is about the size I like."

She laid her small palm in Saval's hand. Then she turned to Servigny.

"Are you going to dance, Muscade? Come, have one turn with me."

Servigny, enraptured, made no reply, but swiftly slipped his arm round her waist, and the two of them whirled away like the wind.

Erect, closely entwined, they twirled and turned, spinning along as if possessed. Their limbs hardly seemed to move. It was as if some invisible mechanism under their feet had set them gyrating. They seemed never to tire. The other dancers fell off one by one, while they went on waltzing as if they would never stop. They seemed to have lost all sense of their surroundings, their minds rapt away in some distant realm of ecstasy. The band played on, their eyes fixed on the frenzied pair, while the company watched, and applauded when at last the music ceased.

The girl's face was flushed now, and her eyes had a strange expression in their depths, at once timid, ardent and troubled. They had lost their challenging gaze, those eyes of hers, with irises so incredibly blue and pupils so startlingly black.

Servigny leant dizzily against a door to recover himself.

"You have no head, my poor Muscade," she said. "I can last out much longer than you."

He gave a nervous laugh, devouring her with his gaze, desire in his eyes and on his smiling lips. She remained

standing before him, her white panting bosom exposed to his glance.

"Sometimes," she went on, "you look like a cat about to spring. Come, give me your arm and let us find your friend."

Without a word, he obeyed, and they crossed the room together.

Saval was no longer alone. The Marquise had joined him. She was uttering commonplace society gossip in that bewitching voice of hers. But while she plumbed the depths of his mind, her eyes seemed fraught with other meaning than that which was expressed by the words upon her lips. As soon as she saw Servigny, her face lit up with a smile and turning to him, she said:

"You know, my dear Duke, I have taken a villa at Bougival for a couple of months. I hope you will pay me a visit there, and bring your friend. I am going to settle in on Monday; will you both dine with me the following Saturday and stay over Sunday?'

Servigny turned quickly to Yvette. She smiled serenely and said with unhesitating assurance:

"Of course, Muscade will come to dinner on Saturday. You need not trouble about his answer. We will have such fun together in the country."

Servigny thought he could detect a promise in the girl's smile, a hidden meaning in her voice.

The Marquise raised her great dark eyes to Saval:

"And you, Baron?"

In the mother's smile at least the meaning was clear. He bowed:—

"I shall be only too happy."

"We'll shock everyone down there, won't we, Muscade?" murmured Yvette, with an archness that might have been either spontaneous or studied. "We'll drive my followers crazy," she added, with a glance at a group of men, who were watching them from a little distance.

"To whatever extent you please, mam'zelle," answered Servigny.

He never said "mademoiselle" in full, because his pose towards her was one of playful friendliness.

"But why, Mademoiselle Yvette, do you always call my friend Servigny 'Muscade'?" asked Saval.

The girl assumed an ingenuous air:—

"Because,' she said frankly, "He's like a juggler's ball. He always slips out of your hands; you think you have him tight, but you can't hold him."

"How quaint these children are!" said the Marquise, indifferently. She was evidently thinking of something else and her eyes never left Saval.

"I am not quaint," pouted Yvette. "I am only telling the truth. I like Muscade, but he always gives me the slip. It's most aggravating."

Servigny bowed to the ground:—

"I will leave you no more, mam'zelle, either by day or by night."

She made a gesture of disgust:—

"No, thank you; you are all very well by day, but I could not stand you at night."

"Why?" he queried, insolently.

"Because you would not look so well undressed," she answered, coolly.

Although she seemed not in the least shocked, the Marquise exclaimed:—

"What appalling things they are saying! Nobody is as innocent as all that."

"I quite agree, Marquise," said Servigny meaningly.

Yvette drew herself up and looked at him as if she were offended:—

"You have just said something very rude," she remarked haughtily; "you have done it too often lately."

And turning round, she called out:—

"Cavaliere, come and protect me. I am being insulted."

A thin, dark man sauntered up.

"Who is the culprit?' he asked with a forced smile.

She nodded towards Servigny:—

"There he is. But I like him better than the rest of you all the same. He doesn't bore me quite so much."

The Cavaliere Valreali bowed:—

"We do our best. We may have fewer graces, but we are no less devoted to you."

A tall, stout man, with grey whiskers and a loud voice, joined the group:

"Your servant, Mademoiselle Yvette."

"Ah, Monsieur de Belvigne," she cried; and turning to Saval, she introduced them: "My acknowledged suitor; he is tall, fat, rich, and deadly dull. The sort of man I like. A real drum-major—to drum you into dinner. But you are even taller than he is. What nickname shall I give you? I know. I shall call you Monsieur de Rhodes junior, for the Colossus must surely have been your father. You two must have all sorts of interesting things to tell each other, above the heads of the rest of us. So I'll say good night."

And she ran off to ask the band to play a quadrille.

Madame Obardi seemed absent-minded. Just for the sake of something to say, she drawled to Servigny:

"You are always teasing the child. You will spoil her temper and teach her bad habits."

"You haven't finished her education then?"

She pretended not to see the insinuation, and went on smiling serenely. Just at that moment she caught sight of a solemn gentleman, who was glittering with orders, and she darted towards him:

"Oh, Prince, what a delightful surprise!"

Servigny took Saval's arm and drew him away.

"There you see the last of my serious rivals, Prince Kravalow. Isn't she a wonder?"

"I think they both are. Well, the mother will do for me."

Servigny bowed:—

"You are welcome to her, my dear fellow."

They were jostled by the dancers, who were forming up in pairs for the quadrille.

"Now for the sharpers," said Servigny, and they entered the card room.

A group of men stood looking on at each table. There was not much talking; but every now and then the tinkle of gold, as it was thrown down or hastily snatched up, mingled its metallic note with the murmured remarks of the players. It was as if money had added its comment to the human utterances.

All the players wore various decorations and curious ribbons. Although their features varied, they all had the same set expression. The chief distinction between them lay in the cut of their beards. There was a stiff American with a horse shoe beard, a supercilious Englishman with a fanlike expanse of hair across his chest, a Spaniard with a black fleece mantling him to the eyes, a Roman with the enormous moustachio which Victor Emmanuel bequeathed to Italy, an Austrian with side whiskers and shaven chin, a Russian General, his big upper lip adorned with two spikes of well-waxed bristles, and two or three Frenchmen with dashing moustaches. Thus the fashion of every barber in the world was represented.

"You won't play?" asked Servigny.

"No; and you?"

"Not here. Shall we be off? We'll come another evening, when it's less crowded. There are too many people to-day; there's nothing doing."

"Come along, then."

They passed through a curtained doorway leading to the hall.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Servigny, when they were in the street.

"It's certainly interesting. But I prefer the women of the set to the men."

"No doubt. These women have more to offer us than any others of their sex. They seem redolent of love, as a barber's shop of scent! These are really the only places where one gets some fun for one's money. What adepts they are, my dear fellow, what artists! Have you ever

eaten cakes from a bakery? They look all right but they're not fit to eat. The man who concocted them can only make bread. Well, the love of the ordinary society woman always reminds me of the uninteresting cakes you buy at the baker's, while the love offered to one at the Marquise Obardi's is the real dainty. Oh yes, those are the pastrycooks who know all about making cakes! Only here we have to pay five sous for what costs two sous elsewhere. That's where the difference lies."

"Who's the reigning favourite just now?" asked Saval.

Servigny shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't an idea. The last one I knew about was an English peer, who left three months ago. To-day she must be living at the expense of the public, either by gambling herself, or by sponging on the gamblers. She has her fancies. But you'll come with me to dine with her on Saturday at Bougival? In the country there will be more opportunities and I shall be able to find out what Yvette really means."

"There's nothing I should like better," said Saval. "I have no engagement that day."

Walking down the Champs-Elysées under the glittering canopy of stars, they disturbed a couple lounging together on a bench and Servigny muttered:

"How absurd and yet how important it is! How commonplace, yet how amusing, is this business of love; always the same, yet always different. The loafer who pays that girl of his one franc, gets exactly the same as I do, when I pay ten thousand francs to an Obardi, who is perhaps not a day younger, and not a whit less uninteresting, than that baggage. What lunacy!"

After a few minutes' silence he went on:

"All the same, Yvette's first lover will be a lucky man. For that I would give . . . I would give . . ."

He could not decide what he would give. The two friends parted at the end of the Rue Royale.

II

THE table had been laid on the veranda overlooking the river. The Villa Printemps, rented by the Marquise Obardi, stood halfway up the hill, and at the foot of the garden wall the Seine curved away in the direction of Marly.

Opposite the house lay the little island of Croissy, a mass of green trees in the distance. The windows commanded a long reach of broad river, as far as the floating café of *La Grenouillère* in its bower of verdure.

Dusk was falling. It was one of those mild evenings by the waterside, aglow with colour and radiating peace and happiness. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves, not a ripple disturbed the still, clear surface of the Seine. The heat was not oppressive. In the pleasant warmth of the evening, it was good to be alive. A grateful coolness rose from the river banks towards the serene sky. The sun was setting behind the trees, about to rise on other lands. There seemed to emanate from the slumbering earth a spirit of beatitude, and from the peace of infinite space a sense of the calm, unruffled life of the universe.

The party came out of the drawing-room and gathered round the dinner table. Everyone was in an ecstatic mood. A tender gaiety held sway. How delicious to dine there out in the pure, balmy air of the open country, with the mighty river and the sunset glow to adorn the scene!

The Marquise took Saval's arm and Yvette Servigny's. There were no other guests. The two women seemed utterly different from what they had been in Paris,

especially Yvette who scarcely spoke at all and seemed languid and grave. Saval hardly recognised her.

"What is the matter with you, Mademoiselle?" he said. "You are entirely changed from what you were last week. You have become quite a serious person."

"It's the effect of the country," she answered. "I'm not a bit the same. I have such a funny feeling. But, then, you see, I'm never the same two days running. One day I feel as mad as a hatter, the next I'm like a mute at a funeral. I am as changeable as the weather; why, I don't know, and I am capable of anything, according to the mood of the moment. There are days, when I could kill people. Not animals though. I simply couldn't kill an animal. But people are different. At other times I burst out crying for nothing at all. I get all sorts of ideas into my head. It all depends on how I feel when I get up. Every morning as soon as I wake, I can tell what mood I shall be in the rest of the day. Perhaps my dreams have something to do with it. But sometimes it's the result of the book I have been reading."

She was dressed in white serge, which fell in soft folds. The full, pleated bodice suggested, rather than defined, the free, firm contours of her rounded bosom. Out of a foam of white lace, whiter even than her gown, rose her slender neck with its languid grace, a masterpiece in ivory, weighed down by her red-gold tresses. Servigny could not take his eyes off her.

"You are too adorable this evening, mam'zelle," he said. "I wish you were always like this."

"You had better not propose to me to-night, Muscade," she replied with a touch of her usual flippancy. "I might take you seriously and that would be hard on you."

The Marquise seemed radiantly happy. The curves of her full, ripe figure were moulded by a clinging, black gown of severe cut, with a touch of red on the bodice. A long spray of carnations fell like a chain from the waist and was caught up at the side. Her whole person, the crimson rose in her dark hair, the simplicity of her attire,

relieved by the blood-red trail of flowers, her brooding look, the lingering accents of her voice, her rare gestures —all seemed to hint at the smouldering passion within her.

Saval, too, seemed lost in thought. Now and then, with a gesture habitual with him, he passed his hand over his brown beard, which he wore trimmed to a point in the fashion of Henri III. He seemed to be musing on serious matters.

There was a silence which lasted several minutes. Then, as trout was being served, Servigny remarked :—

" Silence is sometimes golden. We are often drawn closer to one another by silence than by speech. Don't you agree, Marquise? "

" Certainly," she answered, turning slightly towards him; " it is delightful to think of pleasant things together."

She fixed her ardent gaze on Saval and for a few seconds they looked deep into each other's eyes. There was a slight, almost imperceptible movement under the table.

" Mam'zelle Yvette," Servigny continued, " I shall think that you are in love if you remain so sedate. Now, who can be the happy man? Shall we look into the matter together? I will pass over the common herd, and consider only your most eligible suitors. Is it Prince Kravalow? "

At this suggestion Yvette roused herself :

" My poor Muscade, what an idea! Why, the Prince looks like a Russian out of a waxwork show, or as if he had won his medals in a hairdressing competition."

" Very good; away with the Prince. Perhaps it is the Viscount Pierre de Belvigne, who has won your favour."

She burst out laughing :—

" Can you imagine me flinging my arms round Raisiné's neck, and murmuring in his ear :—' Dear little Pierre ', or ' my divine Pedro, my adored Piétri, my darling Pierrot, lean down your fat head, my bow-wow, to your loving little wife, who is dying to kiss you '? "

She bestowed a nickname on everyone she knew. For the Viscount she had a different one, such as Raisiné, Malvoisie, Argenteuil, for every day of the week.

"Away with him, too. There remains the Cavaliere Valreali, who seems to be your mother's favourite."

Yvette was her merry self again:

"Tearful Val? Why, he's chief mourner at the Madeleine. He attends all the smartest funerals. Whenever he looks at me, I feel that I'm a corpse."

"Three done for. Then perhaps you have been seized with a sudden passion for Baron Saval."

"No. Monsieur de Rhodes junior is too big for me. I should as soon think of falling in love with the Arc de Triomphe."

"Then mam'zelle, it follows that you must be in love with me, for I am the only one of your admirers whom we have not yet disposed of. Partly from modesty, partly from prudence, I kept myself till the last. It only remains for me to express my thanks."

"You, Muscade?" she replied with enchanting gaiety. "Ah, no. I am very fond of you, but I am not in love with you. But don't be downhearted. I am certainly not in love with you—yet. Still, there may be a chance for you. Persevere, Muscade, show yourself devoted, assiduous, humble, attentive; anticipate all my wishes, submit to every whim, and be ready to do anything to please me; and we shall see—later on."

"Ah, mam'zelle, with your kind permission, I should prefer to perform all these services afterwards, rather than beforehand."

"Afterwards? After what, Muscade?" she asked with provocative simplicity.

"After you have proved that you love me, of course."

"Very well, you can behave as if I loved you. You can even believe it, if you like."

"But . . ."

"Shut up, Muscade; we've talked enough nonsense."

He bowed, and relapsed into silence. The sun had set

behind the island; but the sky glowed like a brasier, flooding the unruffled waters of the river, the houses, the people, the entire landscape with blood-red light. The rose in the Marquise's hair looked like a purple drop fallen from the clouds.

While Yvette gazed into the distance, her mother laid her ungloved hand, as if inadvertently, on that of Saval. As soon as the girl stirred, the Marquise hastily withdrew her fingers and toyed with the folds of her bodice.

Servigny, who was watching the pair, turned to Yvette :—

" Would you care for a stroll on the island after dinner, mam'zelle? "

She accepted the suggestion with alacrity.

" Oh, yes, that will be delicious. We'll go by ourselves, won't we, Muscade? "

" Yes, just you and I, mam'zelle."

Silence prevailed once more. The hush that enfolded the spacious landscape, the drowsy peace of evening, cast a spell over soul and body and voice. There are hours so peaceful, so contemplative, that speech is almost out of the question.

The servants waited noiselessly. The glow died out of the sky, and night slowly spread her dark mantle over the earth.

" Do you intend to make a long stay here? " asked Saval.

" Yes, I shall stay as long as I am enjoying myself," answered the Marquise, with meaning in every word.

As the darkness deepened, lamps were lighted. They threw upon the table a pale radiance, contrasting strangely with the intense blackness of surrounding space. A swarm of little insects singed their wings and legs in the heat of the lamps and fell on to the cloth, covering the whole surface, the plates and the glasses with a squirming, greyish layer. There was such a cloud of these tiny flies that they dropped into the wine and into the sauce and crawled over the bread and over hands and

faces, tickling the skin. Wine glasses had to be emptied, dishes covered over, and food eaten with endless precautions. It amused Yvette, and Servigny took infinite pains to protect her plate and glass, and to hold his napkin like a canopy above her head. But it was too much for the Marquise's nerves, and dinner came to an abrupt conclusion.

Yvette had not forgotten Servigny's proposal.

"Now we'll go to the island," she exclaimed.

"Very well. But don't stay too long," said her mother, languidly, "we'll go with you as far as the ferry."

They set out along the towpath, two by two, the girl and her friend in front. Behind them, they could hear the Marquise and Saval talking in low, rapid tones. It was a pitch dark night. But the whole sky glittered with tiny points of fire, which seemed to shower down upon the river, for the dark waters were strewn with stars. All along the banks, frogs were croaking vibrantly, monotonously, and the ethereal song of countless nightingales was wafted on the still air.

"Why, they're not following us!" Yvette suddenly exclaimed. "Where can they have got to? Mamma!" she called. "Mamma!"

There was no reply.

"They can't be very far off," she resumed. "I heard them a minute ago."

"They must have turned back," said Servigny. "Very likely your mother felt cold."

And he drew her along with him. Ahead of them a light was twinkling in the windows of a little inn, which was kept by a fisherman of the name of Martinet. A man came out of the house, in answer to their call, and they boarded a large boat, which was moored amidst the grasses by the water's edge. The ferryman took the oars and his clumsy craft stirred the stars asleep on the water to a delirious dance, which gradually subsided in the wake of the boat.

They reached the island, and landed under the green

boughs. The breath of the cool damp earth hovered beneath the thick branches of the lofty trees, which seemed to have a nightingale for every leaf. In the distance, a piano was playing a popular waltz.

Servigny took Yvette's hand and very gently slid his arm round her waist, pressing it tenderly.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"Nothing. I am just feeling happy."

"Then don't you love me at all?"

"Oh yes, Muscade, I am very fond of you. But, please don't bother me with that just now. The night is so beautiful. I can't listen to your nonsense."

He drew her closer to him, though she tried to shake herself free. Through the smooth soft material of her gown, he could feel the warmth of her body.

"Yvette," he murmured.

"What is it?"

"I do love you, you know."

"You don't really mean it, Muscade."

"Yes, I have been in love with you for ever so long."

She was still trying to break away from him and to free her arm, which was caught between them. Hampered by his embrace and by her efforts to escape, the pair staggered along zigzag fashion as if they were drunk. He did not know how to follow up his avowal. He was aware that one cannot talk to a girl as one can to a grown woman. Utterly at a loss, he wondered what he ought to do next. He could not make up his mind whether she were ready to yield, or whether she had utterly failed to grasp his meaning. He racked his brains for appropriate words, tender and convincing.

"Yvette! O Yvette!" he murmured from time to time.

Then he decided to risk the consequences and he snatched a kiss. Again she started away from him.

"How tiresome you are!" she said in vexation. "Can't you let me alone?"

He could not judge, from the tone of her voice, her real

ideas and wishes. But gathering that she was not deeply offended, he pressed his lips to the golden down on the nape of her neck, which had tempted him so often. At this she struggled desperately to escape. But he held her firmly, and placing his free hand on her shoulder he made her turn her face towards him and printed on her lips a long and passionate kiss.

With a swift and sinuous movement of her whole body, she twisted herself out of his embrace and disappeared into the shadows, her skirts fluttering like the wings of a startled bird.

At first he stood motionless, taken aback by the adroitness with which she had freed herself, and by her sudden flight. Then hearing no sound, he called softly :—

" Yvette."

There was no reply. He walked on, peering into the darkness, searching the bushes for a glimpse of her white dress. But all was inky black.

" Mam'zelle Yvette," he called more loudly.

The nightingales left off singing. Vaguely uneasy, he quickened his steps, and raised his voice :—

" Mam'zelle Yvette! Mam'zelle Yvette!"

Still no sound! He stopped and listened. The whole island was wrapped in silence; hardly a leaf rustled overhead. Only the frogs by the river kept up their sonorous croaking. He wandered from thicket to thicket; he scrambled down the steep, wooded slopes, above the swift flowing arm of the river and then proceeded along the flat borders of a back-water. He went as far as Bougival, which lay on the opposite bank, then retraced his steps to the café of *La Grenouillère,* scanning every clump of trees and calling out repeatedly:

" Mam'zelle Yvette, where are you? Answer! Do answer. It was only a joke. Don't keep me hunting for you like this."

A clock began to strike in the distance. He counted the strokes; it was midnight. He had been exploring the island for a couple of hours. At last it occurred to him

that she might have gone home, and, in deep anxiety, he returned to the house, crossing the river by the bridge. A footman, who had stayed up for him, was asleep in an armchair in the hall. Servigny woke him.

"Has Mademoiselle Yvette been in long? I left her some little way from home . . . because I had to pay a visit."

"Oh yes, your Grace," replied the man; "Mademoiselle was back before ten o'clock."

Servigny went upstairs to his room. But he lay in bed with his eyes open, unable to get to sleep. That stolen kiss had stirred his blood. What did she want with him, he wondered. What did she think? How much did she know? How pretty she was, how bewitching! Desire, dulled by his mode of life, by all the women he had embraced, by all his experiments in passion, blazed up at the thought of that inscrutable child, so fresh, so provoking, so baffling. He heard the clock strike one. Two o'clock struck. There was evidently to be no sleep for him that night. He was feverishly hot and bathed in perspiration. His heart and temples were throbbing. He rose, opened the window and drew a deep breath of cool air. In the dense darkness of the night all was still. Suddenly, under his window, in the gloom of the garden, he saw a bright speck like a little red ember.

"A cigar!" he murmured to himself. "That can only be Saval. Léon," he called softly.

"Is that you, Jean?" answered a voice.

"Yes. Wait a minute. I'll come down."

He threw on some clothes and joined his friend who was sitting astride an iron garden chair and smoking:—

"What are you doing here at this time of night?"

"Recuperating," said Saval, laughing.

"Congratulations," murmured Servigny, shaking his hand; "as for me, I'm sick of it all."

"Which means?"

"Which means that Yvette and her mother are not in the least alike."

"Tell me what has happened."

Servigny recounted his attempt and its failure:

"That child is certainly upsetting me. Do you know I actually couldn't get to sleep. Queer things, girls! She looks as simple as anything, but one hasn't the faintest idea of what she really is. It's easy enough to understand a woman who has lived and loved and knows all there is to know. But in the case of an innocent girl, one is completely at sea. I'm seriously beginning to think that she's making fun of me."

Saval tipped his chair backwards and forwards:—

"Look out for yourself, my boy; she's luring you to the altar. Think of all the illustrious precedents. It was by similar tactics that Mademoiselle de Montijo, who was, however, of good family, became an Empress. Don't be a Napoleon."

"You need not worry. I am neither an Emperor nor a fool. You have to be one or the other to be capable of such lunacy. Are you sleepy?"

"Not in the least."

"Come for a stroll along the bank."

"Delighted."

They opened the iron garden gate and walked down the river towards Marly. It was the cool hour before dawn, the hour when the world is steeped in profound repose, in perfect calm, in deepest peace. Even the whispers of the night were hushed. The nightingales had ceased their singing, the frogs had left off croaking. One solitary creature, possibly some bird, kept repeating with mechanical regularity, a slight, shrill, monotonous sound, like the shriek of a saw.

Presently Servigny, who had his romantic and philosophical moments, exclaimed:

"Well, there it is. That girl is driving me distracted. In arithmetic, one and one make two. In love, one and one are supposed to make one. But they don't. They still make two. Have you ever felt a yearning to absorb one woman utterly, or else to lose yourself in her? I do

not mean a mere physical union, but the agonising desire of mind and spirit to be one with the beloved, to lay heart and soul bare before her, and to fathom the very depths of her nature. But she remains eternally a mystery, and no one will ever read her varying moods, desires and fancies. You will never solve even the beginning of the problem, the inscrutable secret of her soul. However near it may seem, the soul, that lurks within two eyes, as clear as spring water, as limpid as if they hid no secret; the soul, that speaks to you with the lips you adore, the soul, that seems so utterly yours, because of your burning desire for it; the soul, that tells you its thoughts, one by one, in spoken words, is more remote from your own, than star from star, and more mysterious than the planets. How strange it all is!"

"I am content with less," said Saval. "I don't look below the surface of things. The fair outside is enough for me; I care nothing for what it contains."

"Yvette is really a curious creature," observed Servigny. "I wonder how she will receive me this morning?"

As they approached the suburb La Machine de Marly a glimmer of dawn appeared in the sky. Cocks began to crow, the sound somewhat muffled by the walls of the fowlhouses. A bird was chirruping in a garden close by, trilling over and over again its quaint and homely ritornello.

"It's time we turned back," remarked Saval.

They made their way home, and as Servigny regained his room he saw through his open window the sky all flushed with red. He closed the shutters, drew the heavy curtains across and at last fell asleep. Yvette haunted all his dreams.

He was awakened by a curious sound. He sat up and listened, but at first heard nothing. Then something rattled like hail on the slats of the shutter. He jumped out of bed, ran to the window and saw Yvette standing on the garden path. She threw a handful of sand up into

his face. She was wearing a rose-coloured gown and a large straw hat with a sweeping plume.

"Hallo, Muscade," she said with an arch, teasing laugh. "What can you have been doing all night to oversleep yourself like this? Did you have any adventures last night, my poor Muscade?"

The sudden splendour of the daylight dazzled his eyes, which were still heavy and tired; he was taken aback by the girl's calm flippancy.

"Here I am, mam'zelle; I'll just dip my face in my basin and come down."

"Hurry up; it's ten o'clock and we lunch at eleven. I have a great scheme to reveal to you, a secret between you and me."

He found her sitting on a bench with a novel in her lap. She took his arm in a friendly, familiar way, as frankly and gaily as if nothing unusual had happened the previous night, and she dragged him off to the far end of the garden:

"This is the idea. We will disobey Mamma, and you shall take me to *La Grenouillère*. Mamma says that respectable women can't go there. But I don't care whether they can or not; I want to see what it's like. You will take me, won't you, Muscade? And we will have lots of fun with the boating men."

A faint and pleasant scent, which he could not identify, hovered about her. It was not one of the heavy perfumes affected by her mother, but the merest suspicion of orris root and verbena. He could not tell whether it came from her dress, her hair, or her person. As she stood close to him, while she talked, he could feel on his face the no less delicious fragrance of her breath. The thought flashed across his mind that the elusive perfume he endeavoured to define was the creation of his own infatuated senses, a delusive emanation from her gracious and entrancing youth.

"Well, that's settled, Muscade. It will be very hot after luncheon and Mamma will not want to go out.

Hot weather makes her very slack. We'll leave her with your friend and you shall take me. We'll let them think that we have gone up into the woods. If you only knew how I long to see *La Grenouillère.*"

They came to the garden gate opening on to the Seine. The placid, gleaming river was steeped in sunshine. A slight heat mist, a wisp of shimmering water-vapour, hovered above the surface. Now and then a boat went by, a light gig, or a clumsy dinghey. In the distance could be heard the whistle of trains bringing trippers from Paris for a Sunday in the country, and the sirens of steam launches signalling to the lock-keeper at Marly.

The luncheon bell rang and they went into the house. It was a silent meal. The oppressive July noontide brooded over the earth and its denizens. The intense heat seemed to paralyze mind and body. The languid words died away on the lips. The slightest movement was an effort. It was as if the air were tangible and offered resistance. Only Yvette, silent though she was, seemed full of spirits and quivering with impatience.

As soon as dessert was finished, she said :—

" Suppose we go for a walk in the woods. It would be jolly under the trees."

" Are you mad?" said the Marquise, who seemed utterly exhausted. " How could anyone dream of going out in this heat?"

Yvette was overjoyed.

" Very well," she said, " you shall have the Baron to keep you company. Muscade and I will climb the hill and sit on the grass and read. Is that all right?" she added, turning to Servigny.

" I am at your service, mam'zelle," he replied.

She ran off to get her hat.

The Marquise shrugged her shoulders. " She must be mad," she sighed.

Then indolently, drowsily, with amorous languor in her gesture, she gave her fair, white hand to the Baron, who kissed it lingeringly.

Yvette and Servigny set off together. It was too early as yet for *La Grenouillère*. So they walked along the bank and crossed over the bridge to the island, where they sat down under the willows above the swiftly flowing arm of the river.

"Now, Muscade, you can read to me," said the girl, laughing as she drew a book from her pocket and handed it to him.

He made as if to run away:—

"I, mam'zelle? I can't read."

"No excuses and no evasions," she said, gravely. "You are a nice sort of suitor! Everything for nothing is your motto."

He took the volume, and saw to his amazement that it was an entomological treatise, a description of ants and their ways, by an English writer. As he hesitated, convinced that she was poking fun at him, she said impatiently:—

"Why don't you begin?"

"Are you doing this for a bet or is it just a joke?"

"Neither, my dear man. I saw the book in a shop. They told me it was the standard work on ants and I thought it would be interesting to hear all about the lives of these little creatures, while watching them running about in the grass. So please read."

She flung herself on the grass at full length, with her elbows on the ground, and her face resting on her hands, and she lay there gazing intently at the turf.

He began to read:

"No doubt, of all animals, anthropoid apes most nearly resemble human beings, as regards their anatomical structure; but when we consider the habits of ants, their social organisation, their vast communities, the houses they build, and the roads they make, their practice of domesticating other insects and in some cases even treating them as slaves, we are forced to admit that they have a claim to be classed near man in the scale of intelligence."

He read in a monotonous tone, stopping every now and then to ask :—

" Isn't that enough? "

She shook her head and picking up a stray ant on a blade of grass, she amused herself by making it run along the edge, tipping it up as the insect reached one end or the other. She listened entranced to all the surprising details of ant life, their underground dwellings, their way of breeding and rearing captive green-fly for the sake of the sweet juices they secrete, just as we keep cows; their habit of domesticating small, sightless insects for cleaning the anthills, and of waging war in order to bring back slaves, who wait on the conquerors with such assiduity that their masters actually lose the art of feeding themselves. Presently, as if she were moved with maternal tenderness for a creature so tiny, yet so intelligent, she made the ant she had caught climb on to her finger and gazed at it with emotion, as if she would like to fondle it. As Servigny read of their communistic organisation, their friendly rivalry in feats of strength and skill, she was so carried away that she tried to kiss her captive, but the little creature escaped and began running all over her face. She screamed as if in deadly peril and frantically tried to brush it off her cheek. Servigny burst out laughing, caught the ant close to the hair waving on her forehead, and kissed the place lingeringly, before Yvette could turn away her face.

" I like that sort of book better than novels," she said, as she rose to her feet. " Now we'll go to *La Grenouillère.*"

They came to a part of the island which was laid out like a park, with tall shady trees. Couples wandered about under the spreading branches by the Seine, and canoes went gliding past. Young women were strolling with their swains, working girls with their lovers, who walked along in their shirt sleeves, their frock coats over their arms, their tall hats pushed to the back of their heads, with a weary and dissipated air. There were

middle-class families, the women in their Sunday best and the children clustering around their parents like a brood of chickens. A ceaseless buzz of human voices, a dull muffled roar proceeded from *La Grenouillère*, the favourite haunt of Parisian youths with a taste for boating.

Servigny and Yvette came upon it unexpectedly. The café consisted of a huge houseboat, which was moored to the bank. It was crowded with men and women, some sitting and drinking at tables, while others were on their feet, shouting, singing, yelling, dancing, capering to the music of a creaking piano, all out of tune and jingling like a tin kettle. Buxom young women with red hair flaunted their well developed busts and hips. Three parts drunk, they wandered about, ogling the crowd, their crimson lips uttering obscenities. Others were dancing furiously opposite to their partners, who were scantily attired in cloth trousers, cotton vests and coloured jockey caps. The place reeked with the smell of rice powder and perspiring humanity.

At the tables, the revellers were imbibing white, red, yellow or green beverages, and yelling and shouting for no particular reason, simply for the sake of making a noise, possessed by a violent and animal impulse to excite their senses with ceaseless uproar.

From time to time a swimmer would dive from the roof into the water, splashing the nearest holiday makers who swore at him savagely.

A crowd of boats passed up and down the river. Long slender skiffs sped along, propelled by vigorous strokes of oarsmen, whose muscles rippled beneath the skin of their tanned bare arms. Girls in blue or red serge, with red or blue parasols which gleamed in the bright sunshine, lay back, languid and drowsy, on the cushions in the stern of canoes, which skimmed over the water. Heavier craft, full of merrymakers, moved more slowly along. A student on the spree, anxious to show off, sculled with a sort of windmill action, nearly drowning two bathers

and bumping into all the other boats, whose occupants reviled him heartily. At last he disappeared in frantic haste, pursued by the howls of the crowd massed on the floating café.

Radiant with delight, Yvette walked arm in arm with Servigny through the motley and uproarious throng. She seemed positively to enjoy the elbowings of the proletariat, and bestowed upon the young women untroubled and friendly glances.

"Look at that girl, Muscade, what lovely hair! They all seem to be having a good time."

The pianist, a boatman in red with an immense straw hat as broad as a sunshade, struck up a waltz. Yvette seized her companion round the waist and swept him into the dance with all her customary enthusiasm. They kept it up so long and danced so furiously that everyone stared at them. Some of the onlookers jumped on the tables and beat time with their feet; others thumped with their glasses on the table. The pianist caught the madness, he banged his hands down on the ivory keys, wriggling all over and wagging his head wildly beneath his enormous hat. Suddenly he broke off, and slid to the ground, where he lay at full length on the floor, hidden by his monstrous hat, as if he were dead with fatigue. There was a roar of laughter, and all the spectators cheered. Four of his friends rushed up as if hastening to the scene of an accident, and picking up their comrade, they carried him off, covering the body with his grotesque headgear. A wag walked behind them chanting the *De profundis,* and the mock corpse was followed by a procession which, as it wound its way through the paths about the island, was swelled by all the holiday-makers it met.

In an ecstasy of amusement, Yvette entered into the fun. Wildly excited by the noise and the merriment, she talked to everyone she saw. Young men looked deep into her eyes. They pressed up against her in their exuberant spirits, and seemed to inhale her fragrance

and to appraise her with prying glances. Servigny began to fear that the frolic might have unpleasant consequences.

The procession moved on, quickening its pace, as the bearers broke into a run pursued by the howling mob. Suddenly they turned towards the bank, stopped dead on the brink, balanced their burden for a moment, and then, with a concentrated effort, heaved it into the river. A shout of joy rose from the onlookers, while the disconcerted pianist, spluttering, swearing and spitting, floundered through the mud towards the shore. His hat, which was floating downstream, was brought back by a passing boat.

Yvette danced with joy, and clapped her hands.

"Oh, Muscade, what fun it is! What fun it is!"

Servigny watched her. He was sobered and ill at ease, and somewhat shocked at seeing her so much at home among such riffraff. The instinct of propriety, which a well-bred man never loses, even in dissipation, rose in revolt, the instinct, which shrinks from degrading liberties and low associates.

"Hang it, you're your mother's daughter after all," he muttered to himself in dismay.

He had an impulse to address her with the same lack of ceremony wherewith he thought of her, to treat her with the contemptuous familiarity which a man extends to a common woman at first sight. He hardly distinguished her now in his mind from the tawny-haired hussies, who brushed up against them uttering obscenities in their rough voices. Their coarse, curt, lurid remarks seemed to hover and buzz above the crowd like a swarm of flies above the dung heaps which produce them. No one seemed shocked or surprised. Yvette appeared not to notice them.

"Muscade, I want to bathe," she said, "let's have a dip."

"At your service," he answered.

They went to the office and hired bathing dresses. She

was ready first and stood waiting for him on the bank, smiling and attracting general attention. Side by side they plunged into the warm stream.

She swam with rapturous enjoyment, caressed by the ripples, thrilling with a physical delight, rising at each stroke as if she would leap out of the water. Servigny was hard put to it to keep up with her; he was out of breath and vexed to feel himself outclassed. She slackened her pace and turning over on her back floated on the stream, her arms crossed over her bosom, her eyes gazing into the azure sky. As she lay floating, he studied the sinuous lines of her figure, her firm round breasts, clearly defined by the clinging dress, her half-submerged thigh, the curve of her waist, her bare leg, shimmering under the water, and one adorable little foot on the surface. It was as if she had purposely exhibited all her charms to tempt him, offering herself, or yet again making mock of him. He longed for her with a passionate desire, which fretted his nerves to a fever. She turned to look at him and burst out laughing:—

"You do look so odd!" she said.

Her chaff irritated him and roused in him the vindictive wrath of the baffled lover. Yielding to an irresistible impulse to hit back, to revenge himself and hurt her, he said:

"How would that sort of life suit you?"

"What sort of life?" she asked with her customary air of innocence.

"Do stop teasing me. You know quite well what I mean."

"No, I really don't."

"Enough of this fooling. Will you or won't you?"

"I don't understand you."

"You're not so stupid as all that. Besides, I told you last night."

"What? I don't remember."

"That I love you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"What nonsense!"

"I swear it."

"Very well, prove it."

"I ask nothing better."

"Nothing better than what?"

"To prove it."

"Well, why don't you?"

"You did not say that last night."

"You did not make me a formal offer."

"Don't be absurd."

"Besides, you ought not to speak to me first."

"I like that. To whom then?"

"To Mamma, of course."

He burst out laughing:—

"To your mother? What an idea!"

Her smile vanished and she looked steadily into his eyes:—

"Listen to me, Muscade; if you really love me well enough to marry me, you must speak to Mamma first, and I will give you my answer afterwards."

He thought she was still making fun of him and he lost his temper:

"Mam'zelle, you have mistaken your man."

Still fixing on him her mild limpid eyes, she said, after a moment's hesitation:—

"I don't understand you in the least."

He broke out, with a harsh and threatening note in his voice:—

"Come, come, Yvette, let us put an end to this ridiculous farce, which has lasted too long. You are posing as the little innocent girl and believe me, the character doesn't suit you at all. You know quite well that there can be no question of marriage between us . . . only of love. I have told you that I love you; it is the truth; again I say I love you. Don't go on treating me as a fool and pretending not to understand."

They stood face to face, treading water. She remained

where she was a few moments longer, as if she could not bring herself to fathom the meaning of his words; then, all at once, she blushed to the roots of her hair. The blood flushed her face and neck and ears to a deep crimson. Then without a word she struck out for the bank, swimming with all her might with swift strong strokes. He followed panting, but could not overtake her. He saw her step out of the water and run into her bathing-box without turning round.

He lingered over his dressing, trying to make up his mind what he ought to say and do, wondering whether he should ask her pardon or persist in his purpose. By the time he was ready she had gone off by herself. He walked back slowly, moody and depressed.

The Marquise was walking round the lawn arm in arm with Saval. Seeing Servigny she said, with the nonchalant air she had affected since the previous evening :—

"Didn't I tell you not to go out in this heat? Here's Yvette come back with a touch of sun. She has gone to bed. She looked as red as a poppy, poor child, and had a dreadful headache. You must have been walking in the sun, and doing all sorts of silly things. I don't know what you were up to, but you are as self-willed as she is."

The girl did not come down to dinner. A tray was sent up to her room, but she had locked herself in and answered through the door that she was not hungry, and that all she wanted was to be left alone. The two young men went off by the 10 o'clock train, promising to return the following Thursday. The Marquise sat dreaming by the open window, listening to the jerky strains of the band of *La Grenouillère,* wafted to her from a distance through the profound and solemn stillness of the night.

She was possessed by a passion for love, as by a passion for riding or rowing, and was transported like rider or oarsman. The madness would suddenly seize upon her like a fever; pounce upon her, pervade her, excite her, exhaust her, overwhelm her, according to the

form it took, whether rapturous, violent, dramatic, or sentimental. She was one of those women, who are created to love and be loved. Sprung from the lowest depths, she had risen, thanks to her amorous propensities, which almost unconsciously she had exploited like a profession. Obeying her instinct, following her natural bent, she accepted money and caresses alike as a matter of course, using her amazing powers of intuition in a direct and unreasoning fashion, like animals roused to cunning by the stress of existence. Many a man had lain in her arms, without arousing her tenderness, or on the other hand exciting her disgust. She endured these casual embraces with a tranquil indifference, much as hunger obliges one to put up with any sort of cookery on a journey. But now and then her blood was fired and she plunged into a serious passion, which lasted some weeks or some months according to the physical or mental qualities of her lover.

These were the delectable episodes in her life, when she loved with heart and soul and senses, with ecstasy, with transport. She would throw herself into her passion as one throws oneself into a river to drown. Prepared to face even death, intoxicated, entranced, ineffably happy, she would let herself be swept away. On each occasion she believed that she had never before known such bliss. She would have been dumbfoundered, if she had been reminded of all the different men who had inspired her with ecstatic dreams, while she sat star-gazing a whole night long.

Saval had bewitched her, body and soul. The thought of him filled her mind. She was steeped in a tranquil exhilaration compounded of past and present bliss.

She turned as she heard a sound behind her. Yvette had entered, still in the dress she had worn all day. She was pale now, and her eyes were shining as if she were feverish with exhaustion. She leaned against the sill of the open window and faced her mother :—

" I want to talk to you."

The Marquise looked at her in surprise. She loved her daughter with maternal egoism; she was proud of her beauty, as she would have been of a substantial fortune, and she was still too handsome herself to feel jealous. Too casual to concoct the schemes with which everyone credited her, she was yet too astute not to be aware of the value of this asset.

"Well, my child, what is it?"

Yvette scrutinised her, as if she would fathom the depths of her soul, and watch the full effect of the words she was about to utter.

"Something very extraordinary has happened."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur de Servigny has told me that he loves me."

The Marquise waited anxiously. But Yvette said no more.

"What did he say?" asked her mother. "Explain yourself."

With a coaxing way she had, the girl sat down at her mother's feet and clasped her hands.

"He asked me to marry him."

Madame Obardi started in amazement:—

"Servigny? You must be out of your mind."

Yvette still kept her eyes watchfully fixed on her mother, and noted her astonishment.

"But why?" she asked calmly. "Why should not Monsieur de Servigny wish to marry me?"

"You must have misunderstood," the Marquise faltered in embarrassment, "It is impossible. You cannot have heard correctly. Monsieur de Servigny is too . . . too wealthy a match for you, he is too—too—much of a society butterfly ever to marry."

Yvette had risen slowly to her feet:—

"But if he loves me as he says?"

There was a hint of impatience in her mother's reply:—"I thought you were too old, that you knew too much about life to take such ideas into your head. Servigny cares solely for himself and his own amuse-

ment. If he does marry it will be a woman of his own social standing and of equal fortune. If he proposed to you, it's because he wants—because he wants——"

Unable to find words to express her suspicions, the Marquise broke off. After a moment's reflection she said:

"Leave me in peace and go to bed."

As if she had learnt what she wanted, the girl replied obediently:—

"Yes, Mamma."

She kissed her mother's forehead and calmly turned to leave the room. As she was closing the door the Marquise called her back:—

"What about your touch of sun?"

"I haven't one. It was the other thing that upset me."

"We will talk it over another time," said the Marquise. "But be careful not to remain alone with him for some time to come; you may be quite sure that he will never marry you. He only wants to—to—compromise you."

She could not think of any better way of expressing her meaning. And Yvette returned to her room.

Madame Obardi remained plunged in thought. Living for years a life of voluptuous ease, she had carefully dismissed from her mind any forebodings which might disturb or depress her. She had never allowed herself to dwell upon Yvette's future; time enough to think of that when complications arose. With the intuitive discernment of her profession, she recognized that her daughter would never marry a rich man of good social standing, except by some most unlikely stroke of luck, by one of those amazing chances in the history of love which have raised adventuresses to a throne. She did not count upon such an event. She was too busy with her own affairs to trouble her head about schemes that did not immediately concern herself. No doubt Yvette would follow in her mother's footsteps. Why not? But the Marquise had never ventured to ask herself when or how this would come about.

Now suddenly, without any warning, her daughter had

confronted her with an unanswerable question, forcing her to take up a definite position in a matter difficult, delicate and dangerous to a degree, as well as peculiarly embarrassing to a mother's conscience. Her natural shrewdness, though in abeyance, never actually slumbered. Not for one moment was she deceived as to Servigny's intentions. She knew men too well, especially men of his class. Thus Yvette's first words had forced from her the involuntary cry :—

"Servigny marry you? You must be out of your mind."

How had he come to use that stale device, a man like Servigny, crafty, debauched and dissipated? What would be his next move? How could she convey to the child a clearer warning, how could she possibly protect her? She knew that Yvette was capable of the wildest folly. It was inconceivable that this growing girl should have remained so innocent, so ignorant, so guileless. Puzzled and wearied with much thinking, the Marquise racked her brains in vain for a solution of this problem which seemed to her so singularly embarrassing. At last, exhausted by her perplexities, she said to herself :—

"Well, I must just keep my eye on them and act according to circumstances. If it comes to the worst I will speak to Servigny; he's sharp enough to take a hint."

She did not stop to consider what she should say to him or what he would reply or what sort of bargain they would strike. Happy at being relieved from anxiety without the trouble of coming to a resolution, she reverted to thoughts of Saval, her handsome lover. Gazing into the night towards the luminous haze which hovered over Paris away to the right, she kissed her hands to the great city. Kiss after kiss she wafted into the darkness and in a low voice, as if he were with her, she murmured :—

"How I love you! How I love you!"

III

YVETTE, like her mother, had not been to sleep. She too leant out of the open window, and tears, her first tears of real sorrow, filled her eyes.

Hitherto she had lived and grown up in the thoughtless serene confidence of joyous youth. What occasion was there for her to think, to reflect, to question? Why should she have supposed herself different from other girls? Why should she ever have been assailed by doubts, fears, suspicions? She seemed aware of all the facts of life because she talked about everything, catching the tone, gestures, and free speech of those around her. But she knew no more than a girl straight out of a convent. Her audacities of speech were mechanical; they sprang from the feminine faculty of imitation and assimilation, not from a coarsened and sophisticated mind. She talked about love as the ten-year-old son of a painter or musician might discourse on pictures or music. She knew, or at least shrewdly suspected, the kind of mystery the word concealed. Too many jests had been whispered in her hearing, for her innocence to have remained wholly unenlightened. But what reason had she to imagine that all other families were not like her own?

Men kissed her mother's hand with apparent respect; all their friends were titled; all were, or seemed, rich; all spoke familiarly of Princes of the Blood. Two sons of kings had even come on several evenings to their house. How could she have divined the truth?

She was, moreover, of ingenuous disposition. She did not study the people she met as did her keen-scented mother. Her mind was at ease; she was too full of the

joy of life to be disturbed by incidents which might have seemed suspicious to persons more aloof, more calculating, more self-contained, less triumphantly frank.

And now, behold, all of a sudden, Servigny, by words of which she felt, without fully understanding, the brutality, had aroused in her a feeling which was at first mere indefinite uneasiness, but soon developed into harassing apprehension.

She had fled like a wounded animal, wounded indeed, and sorely, by those words of his which she kept repeating to herself in an effort to understand them completely, to penetrate their significance in relation to herself:

"You know quite well there can be no question of marriage between us . . . only of love."

What had he implied? and why had he wished to insult her? Was there then some shameful secret of which she alone, it seemed, was ignorant? What could it be? She felt bewildered, overwhelmed, as by the revelation of some secret infamy or by a treacherous act on the part of a dear friend, one of those tragedies of the soul which drive one distraught.

Harrowed by doubts and suspicions, she pondered and reflected, shedding tears over the secret she was endeavouring to probe. Presently, however, the joyous temperament of youth restored her serenity. She set herself to think out a story, to devise a situation, out of the common and dramatic, with the help of all the poetical romances she remembered to have read. With all the moving incidents, the poignant and affecting details she could recall, she concocted an autobiography, embellished by the vague mystery that enveloped her existence. As her agitation subsided, she fell into a reverie, catching here and there a glimpse of baffling mysteries. She imagined impossible complications, a thousand singular and horrifying incidents, which allured by their very strangeness.

Was she, perchance, the natural daughter of a prince, who had seduced and abandoned her poor mother? After

she had been made a Marquise by a king, perhaps even by Victor Emmanuel himself, had she been forced to flee before the wrath of his family? Or, more likely still, was she the offspring of a guilty passion, a child who had been cast adrift by noble and illustrious parents, and adopted by the Marquise and brought up as her own?

Other possibilities crossed her mind. She accepted and rejected them as her fancy directed. She felt a tender sympathy for herself. Sorrowful, yet fundamentally happy, she complacently regarded herself as a heroine out of a book, who had only to make the most of herself; to adopt a noble attitude, worthy of her own nature. She pictured the part she should play, varying it according to the incidents she imagined. She had only a shadowy idea of this new rôle of hers, which resembled some character of Scribe or Madame Sand. Devotion, pride, self-denial, magnanimity, tenderness, eloquence were all included. With this new conception of herself, her volatile spirits became almost exultant.

She spent the rest of the afternoon devising some means of extracting the truth from the Marquise. By nightfall, the hour appropriate to tragic situations, she had resolved on a simple yet subtle plan which would serve her purpose. She decided to tell her mother abruptly that Servigny had asked her in marriage. Surprised by this announcement, Madame Obardi would surely let fall some remark or exclamation which would illuminate her daughter's mind.

Thus Yvette had put her plan into execution. She had been prepared for astonishment, for some revelation, accompanied by tears and demonstrations of affection. But her mother, on the contrary, far from exhibiting either amazement or sorrow, seemed merely to be annoyed. From the peevishness of her mother's reply, Yvette, suddenly endowed with all a women's subtlety, finesse and astuteness, realised that she would be well advised to desist from further questions, that the mystery was likely to be painful, rather than romantic, and that

she must work out the problem for herself. Sick at heart, weighed down by the dread of some authentic tragedy, yet unable to trace the source of her apprehension, she retired to her room, and sat weeping by the open window.

She cried for a long time, her mind a blank, with no desire for further investigation, till by degrees she was overcome by fatigue, and closed her eyes. Too tired to undress or go to bed, she slept fitfully for some minutes with the uneasy torpor of exhaustion. Her slumber was continually broken by sudden starts, as her head slipped off her hand. She did not go to bed till the first glimmer of dawn, when the chill of early morning drove her from the open window.

For the next two days she maintained an attitude of melancholy reserve. Her mind was working rapidly and incessantly; she was watching, conjecturing, putting two and two together. A new light was dawning, though vaguely as yet, upon the men who came to the house, and upon her whole environment. Her suspicions were aroused; she distrusted her own convictions, and all her friends, even her mother. She envisaged every possibility, making the most outrageous resolutions, as her variable and undisciplined fancy dictated. On Wednesday she devised a whole new scheme of conduct and a complete system of espionage. Thursday morning found her armed for war against the world and determined to act with all the craft of a trained detective. She actually decided to take for her motto the words—"Myself alone," and spent an hour considering how the legend could be arranged most effectively round the monogram on her notepaper.

Saval and Servigny arrived at ten o'clock that morning.

The girl received them with reserve, but without embarrassment. In tones familiar though grave, she asked:

"Well, Muscade, how goes it?"

"All right, mam'zelle, and you?"

He watched her keenly, speculating as to what lay behind her mask of seriousness.

The Marquise took Saval's arm and Servigny Yvette's, and they walked round the lawn in and out among the clumps of trees.

Yvette was pensive and composed. Her eyes were fixed on the path; she hardly listened to her companion's conversation, and answered at random. Suddenly she asked :—

" Are you really my friend, Muscade? "

" How can you ask? "

" No, but really and truly? Honestly? Seriously? "

" Your devoted friend, mam'zelle, body and soul."

" So that just for once you would not tell me a lie? Just for once? "

" Just for twice, if you like."

" You would really tell me the whole truth, however horrid? "

" Yes, mam'zelle."

" Then, what do you really think, in your inmost heart, of Prince Karalow? "

" My dear girl! "

" There you see, you are trying to think of a lie at once."

" No; I am only endeavouring to find the right words. Prince Karalow is a Russian, a real Russian, speaking Russian, born in Russia. No doubt he entered France with a passport and there is nothing bogus about him except his name and title."

She gazed steadily into his eyes :—

" You mean that he is . . ."

He hesitated, then took the plunge :—

" An adventurer, mam'zelle."

" Thank you; and Cavaliere Valreali is no better? "

He assented.

" And Monsieur de Belvigne? "

" Ah, he's different. He's a country gentleman, a decent fellow . . . within limits . . . but a little the worse for wear from having gone the pace too much."

" And you? "

This time he answered without a moment's hesitation:

"I, mam'zelle? Well, I am what they call a pleasure seeker. I come of good family. I started with some intelligence and frittered it away in all sorts of futilities. I had a fine constitution which I wasted in dissipation. There were possibilities in me, but I sacrificed them to my indolence. The sum and substance of what is left to me consists of a certain worldly experience, a plentiful lack of prejudices, a sovereign contempt for men, yes, and for women too, a profound sense of my own uselessness, and a vast toleration for the seamy side of human nature. I have, however, as you see, lucid intervals when I speak the truth; I am even capable of affection, as you may learn some day. With these defects and these virtues, I place myself at your disposal, mam'zelle, body and soul, for you to do with me as you please."

She did not laugh. She listened attentively, trying to grasp the meaning of his words.

"What do you think of the Countess de Lammy?"

His reply came prompt and unequivocal.

"You must excuse me for not giving my opinions about the ladies."

"Not about any of them?"

"Not one."

"Which means that you have a low opinion of all of them. Is there no exception?"

His face now resumed its customary sneer of insolence. With the brutal arrogance, to which he habitually had recourse as a weapon of offence, he replied:

"Present company is always excepted."

She blushed a little, but asked him calmly:

"And what do you think of me?"

"You insist? Very well. I think you have plenty of intelligence and unusual capability, or, if you prefer it, great practical sense. You love to confuse the issues and to amuse yourself at other people's expense; you lay the snare and then, without impatience, await the event."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, mam'zelle."

Gravely, seriously, she replied :—

"I will make you change that opinion, Muscade."

She went towards her mother, who was walking very slowly, with drooping head, and the languid air of one who whispers secrets of love. As she moved along, she traced letters and figures in the sand with the point of her sunshade. She talked languorously, incessantly, not looking at Saval, but leaning on his arm and pressing close to him. Yvette fixed her eyes on her mother, and a vague suspicion, intuitive rather than logical, passed through her mind like the shadow of a cloud blown across the sky.

The luncheon bell rang. It was a silent, almost melancholy meal. A storm was brewing. Masses of cloud lay on the horizon like ambushed armies, brooding, silent, menacing.

As soon as they had finished coffee on the veranda, the Marquise asked :

"Well, darling, are you going for a walk with Monsieur Servigny? It will be cool and pleasant under the trees."

"No, Mamma, I am not going out to-day," answered Yvette, casting on her a quick glance and averting it as rapidly.

The Marquise seemed vexed :

"Do go for a turn, child; it will be good for you."

"No, Mamma," Yvette replied brusquely, "I want to stay at home to-day and you know why, after what I told you the other evening."

Oblivious of everything save her desire to be alone with Saval, Madame Obardi had forgotten her conversation with Yvette. She blushed, and began anxiously to wonder how she could manage to shake off her daughter for an hour or two. In confusion, she murmured :—

"Of course; I forgot. You are right. I don't know what possessed me."

Picking up a piece of embroidery which she called her "work of utility," and which she touched perhaps five or

six times a year on exceptionally dull days, Yvette took a low seat near her mother, while the young men sat astride their folding-chairs, smoking cigars.

Time passed; conversation languished and seemed always on the point of expiring. The Marquise, her nerves on edge, cast passionate glances on Saval and she tried to find some pretext for getting rid of the girl. She racked her brains for a stratagem, but at last, realising her failure, she turned to Servigny :—

"I expect you both to stay the night, my dear Duke. To-morrow we will lunch at the Restaurant Fournaise at Chatou." Taking the hint, Servigny smiled and bowed :—

"I am at your disposal, Marquise."

And so the tedious day dragged on wearily, and still the storm threatened.

Dinner time came at last. The clouds had crept up, slow and massive, until they now completely covered the sky. There was not a breath of air. The evening meal, too, was a silent one. All four were embarrassed and ill-at-ease, and a vague presentiment of coming evil seemed to seal their lips.

When the table was cleared, they sat about on the terrace, speaking only by fits and starts. Night fell heavy and stifling. Suddenly the sky was rent by a vivid fork of lightning, in the dazzling glare of which the four faces flashed out from the darkness. A low muffled noise, like the rumbling of a cart over a bridge, was heard in the distance; the heat grew more intense, the air more oppressive, the silence of the night more profound.

Yvette rose from her chair :—

"I am going to bed; storms always upset me."

Kissing her mother and shaking hands with the two young men, she went off. Her room was just above the terrace and presently the light from her window fell on the green leaves of a great chestnut tree standing before the front door. Servigny's eyes remained fixed upon the pale radiance which shone upon the foliage; every now and then he thought he saw a shadow flit past.

The light went out and Madame Obardi sighed:
"The child has gone to bed."
Servigny rose:
"I will do the same, Marquise, with your permission."
She held out her hand to him. He kissed it, and went away, leaving her alone with Saval and the night.

In a moment she was responding ardently to Saval's embraces. Then, in spite of his efforts to prevent her, she sank on her knees at his feet, murmuring:—
"I must gaze on you by the gleam of the lightning flashes."

After extinguishing the candle, Yvette had come out on to her balcony with bare feet, gliding like a ghost, and she stood there listening, tormented by a vague, but agonising suspicion. Being immediately above them on the roof of the terrace, she could not see the pair. She caught only the murmur of voices, and the sound of her own heart throbbing tumultuously. Overhead she heard a window being closed, so she knew that Servigny had gone upstairs. Her mother was alone with the other man. A second flash rent the sky, showing up for a second the familiar landscape in a sudden lurid glow; she saw the broad river, the colour of molten lead, like the rivers of a fantastic land of dreams. And beneath her she heard a voice say: "How I love you!"

A strange shudder passed over her and her mind was overwhelmed by terrible apprehension. Silence, oppressive, infinite, as it were the silence of eternity, brooded over the world. Half suffocated by mysterious terror, she could hardly breathe. Flash after flash lit up the sky. And the voice she had already heard repeated in a louder tone:—"Oh, how I love you! how I love you!" Yvette recognised only too well her mother's tones. A large, tepid raindrop fell on her face; an almost imperceptible quiver shook the leaves; it was the prelude of the coming deluge. From afar came a rustling sound, as of wind in the trees; a heavy downpour of rain began, descending in sheets on earth, river and forest. In a moment, the

water streamed and splashed over her like a shower-bath, soaking her through and through. Her attention concentrated on the scene on the veranda, she made not the slightest movement. She heard her mother and Saval rise and go upstairs. Doors were closed inside the house. Obeying an irresistible and frenzied impulse to know the worst, the girl rushed downstairs, noiselessly opened the front door, and crossing the lawn under a furious deluge, ran to hide in a clump of trees whence she could see the windows.

Only one window, that of her mother's room, showed a light. Presently in that patch of radiance appeared two shadows, side by side. They drew towards each other and melted into one. A fresh flash of lightning threw upon the front of the house a swift dazzling glare and she saw them embrace, their arms round each other's necks.

Distraught and without thinking what she was doing, she shrieked in a loud shrill voice: "Mamma," as if to warn her of a fatal danger.

Her despairing cry seemed lost in the din of the storm, but the two lovers broke away from each other with a start. One of the shadows vanished, while the other peered into the darkness of the garden.

Fearing to be caught or to meet her mother, Yvette dashed into the house, darted upstairs, leaving a trail of water on each step, and locked herself into her room, determined not to open her door to anyone.

Without taking off her frock, which clung about her in streaming folds, she fell on her knees with clasped hands, in her anguish invoking divine protection, the mysterious succour and support, which the soul seeks in moments of despair and tribulation.

Sheets of lightning cast their lurid reflection into the room, and in the mirror of her wardrobe she caught sight of an image, with damp and dishevelled hair, so strange of aspect that she hardly recognised herself. She stayed so long on her knees that she was unconscious of the passing of the storm. The rain ceased, light crept over

the still clouded sky; a grateful coolness, perfumed and delicious, rose from the moist grass and leaves, and stole in through the open window. Yvette rose from her knees, mechanically took off her clammy and bedraggled clothes and went to bed. There she lay with wide open eyes fixed on the dawning day. Her tears again began to flow, until at last she sank into a reverie.

Her mother! a lover! what a disgrace! But she had read so many books in which women, even mothers of families, had surrendered themselves like this, only to recover their honour in the closing scene, that she was not too utterly dismayed at finding herself involved in a drama similar to those enacted in novels. The violence of her first distress, the shock of surprise, were already somewhat mitigated by her confused memories of similar situations. So many tragic adventures, described with poetic touches by novelists, had passed through her mind that the dreadful discovery gradually appeared to her as the natural sequel of a story she had begun on the previous evening.

"I will save my mother," she said to herself.

Almost restored to serenity by this noble resolve, she felt herself stronger, more heroic; of a sudden she was prepared for self-devotion, ready for the encounter. She considered the best means of compassing her purpose. Only one possible expedient occurred to her, and it suited her romantic disposition. As an actor thinks out the scene which he is to play, she planned the details of her coming interview with the Marquise.

The sun rose. Servants bustled about the house and the maid came in with her chocolate. Yvette told her to put the tray on the table:—

"Tell my mother that I am not well and shall stay in bed till the gentlemen have gone. Say that I have not slept all night, and that I would rather no one disturbed me, as I wish to try to get some rest."

The maid saw with surprise the rain-soaked clothes, lying in a sodden heap on the floor.

"You have been out, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, I went out into the rain to get some fresh air."

The maid picked up the frock, the stockings and the muddy shoes, threw them over her arm and, with an air of disgust, carried them off. The dripping garments looked like the clothes of someone drowned.

Positive that her mother would come up to see her, Yvette waited.

The Marquise, who had jumped out of bed at the maid's first words, entered her daughter's room. She had felt uneasy, ever since she had heard from the darkness that shriek: "Mamma."

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

Yvette looked at her and stammered:—

"I . . I . . ."

But overcome by a rush of violent emotion, she choked in her efforts to speak.

"Whatever is it?" asked the Marquise in astonishment.

Forgetting all her plans and her set speeches, the girl covered her face with her hands and sobbed out:—

"Oh Mamma, Mamma!"

Madame Obardi stood and looked at her daughter. Although, in her surprise, she did not clearly understand the situation, yet, with the instinctive subtlety, which was her strongest characteristic, she made a shrewd guess at the truth. Choking with sobs, Yvette was for a time unable to speak. Irritated by her behaviour, the Marquise, who realized that some unpleasant explanation was threatening, said sharply:

"Come, come, tell me at once what is wrong with you?"

Yvette could hardly utter the words:—

"Oh Mamma . . . Last night . . . I saw—your window."

The Marquise turned pale. But she retorted:

"Well, what of it?"

Still sobbing, her daughter could only repeat:—

"Oh, Mamma, Mamma!"

Madame Obardi, whose anxiety and embarrassment were fast giving way to anger, shrugged her shoulders and turned to leave the room.

"You must be crazy. When you are yourself again, perhaps you will let me know."

At this the girl suddenly uncovered her face, down which the tears were pouring.

"No. Listen to me. I must speak. Listen. You must promise to go away with me, just our two selves, to some place far off in the country where we will live like poor people; and no one shall know what has become of us. Won't you do this, Mamma? I entreat you. I implore you, Mamma. Won't you?"

The Marquise stood in the middle of the room, speechless with amazement. In her veins ran the easily-roused blood of the people. Shame and a mother's reserve were mingled with vague apprehension and with the rage of a passionate woman, whose love is menaced. She trembled with conflicting emotions, equally ready to sue for pardon, and to perpetrate some act of violence.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I saw you, Mamma, last night. This must not go on ——if you only knew how I feel——we will go away together. My devotion shall make you forget——"

"Listen to me, my child," said Madame Obardi in a quivering voice, "There are things which you do not understand yet. Well, never forget this—I forbid you—remember—I forbid you ever to speak to me of—of——such matters——"

But the girl was not to be turned from the work of rescue which she had so impulsively undertaken.

"No, Mamma, I am not a child and I have the right to know. Well, I have discovered that we receive adventurers and people of no reputation, and that therefore we are not respected. And I know more than that. Well, there must be an end of all this. I have made up my mind. We will go away; you shall sell your jewels. We will find some occupation, if necessary, and we will

live respectably somewhere far from here. And if I can find a husband, so much the better."

Her mother's dark eyes flashed angrily:

"You must be mad. Oblige me by getting up and coming down to luncheon with the rest of us."

"No, Mamma. There is a man in the house whom I decline to see again. Either he goes or I go. You must choose between us."

She sat up in bed and raised her voice, as if she were on the stage, entering at last into the spirit of the drama of which she had dreamed, and so absorbed in her mission as almost to forget her grief.

Half dazed, the Marquise could only repeat:—

"You must be mad."

"No, Mamma," replied Yvette with histrionic emphasis, "either that man goes, or I leave the house; nothing shall make me give way."

"But where will you go? What will you do?"

"I don't know and I don't care. All I insist on is that we shall live as respectable women."

The repetition of the phrase "respectable women" roused in the Marquise all the worst passions of her class.

"Hold you tongue!" she cried. "I won't have you talking like that. I'm as good as anyone else. I am a courtesan, it is true, and I am proud of it. Your respectable women are not a bit better."

"Oh Mamma," sobbed Yvette, utterly overcome.

"Yes, I am a courtesan," screamed the Marquise in a towering rage; "what of that? If I were not a courtesan you would be a scullery maid, as I used to be, on thirty sous a day; you would have to wash up the dishes and go to the butcher's and your mistress would turn you into the street if you loitered on the way; while now, because I am a courtesan, you can loaf about all day. So there. When one is only a servant, a poor girl with fifty francs of savings, one must find a way out, if one does not want to end up by dying of starvation; and for a servant there

is no alternative, I tell you plainly. We cannot make our fortune in politics or by cheating on the Stock Exchange. We have nothing to sell but ourselves."

Flushed with excitement, she smote her breast like a penitent in the confessional and came nearer to the bed.

"It's a bad business, but a pretty girl must either live by her good looks or spend all her life in misery and poverty. All her life. She has no choice."

Then harking back, she went on:

"As if the 'respectable women,' as you call them, were any better! It is they who are really the bad ones. There is nothing to force them to do it. They are not poor; they can enjoy life and amuse themselves, and they take up with men from sheer vice. They are really the bad ones, I tell you."

She stood over Yvette, who crouched on the bed, horror-stricken, ready to cry for help or rush from the room. She was sobbing aloud like a beaten child. The Marquise said no more; but seeing her daughter distracted and in despair, she herself felt a reaction. Overcome by sorrow and remorse, by tenderness and pity, she threw herself on the bed, clasped Yvette in her arms and sobbed out:—

"My poor little girl, my poor little girl. If you only knew how you are hurting me."

They mingled their tears for a long, long time.

Presently the Marquise, quick to recover herself, rose gently to her feet and whispered:—

"Come, darling, that's how it is and we must make the best of it. We can't alter things now. We must take life as it comes."

But Yvette went on crying. The shock had been too severe and too utterly unexpected for her to be able to think rationally and regain her composure.

"Come," said her mother; "get up for luncheon so that no one may notice that anything is wrong."

The girl shook her head as if unable to speak; then with an effort, her voice shaken by sobs, she said:

"No, Mamma; you heard what I said; I can't change my mind. I will not leave my room till they are gone. I don't want ever to see any of these people again. If they come back, I——I——you will never see me again."

"Come, come, think it over and be reasonable," murmured the Marquise, worn out with emotion and wiping away her tears. Then after a moment's pause:—

"Perhaps after all you had better stay in bed this morning. I will come and see you again in the afternoon."

Kissing the girl's forehead, she went away to dress, mistress of her emotions once more.

As soon as her mother had gone, Yvette jumped up and bolted the door so as not to be disturbed, and settled down to think out the situation.

At about eleven o'clock, the maid knocked and said through the door:—

"The Marquise wishes to know if you want anything, Mademoiselle, and what you would like for luncheon."

"I'm not hungry," answered Yvette. "All I want is to be left alone."

She stayed in bed as if she were seriously ill. About three o'clock, there came another knock at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

Her mother's voice replied:—

"It's I, darling. I have come to see how you are."

Yvette hesitated for a moment. Then she opened the door and went back to bed.

The Marquise came to the bed-side and said in a low voice, as if speaking to an invalid:—

"Well, are you better? Couldn't you manage an egg?"

"No, thank you; I don't want anything."

The Marquise sat down by her side, and for a time neither of them spoke. At last, seeing her daughter lying inert, her hands listlessly resting on the bedclothes, Madame Obardi said:—

"Aren't you going to get up?"

"Yes, presently," answered Yvette, adding in a grave and deliberate tone:—"I have thought it all out, Mamma,

and have made up my mind. The past is past; we need not refer to it. But the future must be different. Otherwise . . . otherwise, I have made up my mind what to do. Now don't let us discuss it again."

The Marquise, who had thought this business of explanation was over and done with, felt her patience giving way. It was rather too much. This great goose of a girl ought to have guessed long ago. But she did not argue; she merely asked :—

" Are you going to get up now? "

" Yes, immediately."

Her mother acted as her maid, bringing her stockings, corsets, petticoats. Then she kissed her :—

" Would you like to take a turn before dinner? "

" Yes, Mamma."

So they strolled along by the river, conversing little, and only on commonplace topics.

IV

NEXT morning Yvette went off by herself and sat down on the hillside, where Servigny had read to her the story of the ants.

"I won't stir from this spot till I have really made up my mind."

At her feet flowed the swift current of the open river-branch, silent, rapid, gliding along in whirling eddies and deep rolling vortices.

She had already examined the situation from every point of view, and explored every avenue of escape. What should she do if her mother declined to accept her conditions, declined to renounce her mode of life with its social pleasures, to go and bury herself with her daughter in the depths of the country? She might run away by herself. But whither? and how could she live? By working? At what? To whom could she apply for employment? Moreover the dull drudgery of the women of the lower orders seemed something to be ashamed of, beneath her dignity. She might be a governess and, as so often happened in novels, the son of the house might fall in love with, and eventually, marry her. But for that she must be of noble birth, so that when the enraged father reproached her with having led his son astray, she could say haughtily:

"I am Yvette Obardi."

This, alas! was out of the question. Besides, the device was stale and commonplace.

The idea of a convent had no attraction for her. She had no vocation for the religious life, her piety being casual and unstable. No one would marry her, knowing

who she was. She could accept assistance from no man. She had no means of escape, no final resource.

She aspired, moreover, to some strenuous, noble and heroic effort, whereby she should set an example to the world. And she decided that death was her only refuge. She came to this resolve, suddenly and calmly, as if it were merely a question of setting forth on a journey. Unreflecting, she did not envisage death nor realise that it was a termination which precluded a fresh beginning, a departure with no possibility of return, an eternal farewell to life and to the world. She came to this solemn determination with the lightheartedness of a young and ardent spirit. Next she meditated on the means. Every method seemed to involve great trouble and risk of failure, and to require, in addition, some violent act from which she recoiled. She at once discarded the idea of dagger or revolver. These might only wound, or disfigure; they needed a steady, practised hand. Hanging was vulgar, repulsive, grotesque, the pauper's last resource. Drowning? She swam too well. Poison? Yes, but what poison? Almost all poisons were painful and made one sick. She shrank from the idea of suffering and nausea. At last, she thought of chloroform, having read in a newspaper a detailed account of a young woman, who had asphyxiated herself by means of that drug.

She felt a strange sense of exhilaration, a thrill of triumph, of spiritual pride. People should see what sort of person she was, how worthy of admiration.

She went back to Bougival and asked at a chemist's for a few drops of chloroform for toothache. The man, who knew her, gave her a whole little phial of the drug. At Croissy she obtained another phial and two more at Chatou and Rueil. She arrived home late for luncheon. She was very hungry after her round and ate a great deal, with the enjoyment induced by exercise.

Her mother, who was delighted to see her with such a good appetite, felt that peace was restored, and said, as they left table:

"All our friends are coming to spend Sunday with us. I have asked the Prince, the Cavaliere and Monsieur de Belvigne."

Yvette turned pale, but did not answer. She set out almost at once for the station and took a ticket for Paris. She spent the afternoon going from one chemist to another, buying from each a few drops of chloroform. She returned in the evening with her pockets full of tiny phials. She repeated these proceedings on the following day and at one druggist's she was able to obtain nearly half a pint all at once.

On Saturday she stayed at home; it was hot and oppressive; she spent the day on the terrace, lying in a long wicker chair. She was calm and determined; reasons and reflections no longer harassed her.

Next day, wishing to look her best, she put on a becoming blue frock. As she gazed at herself in the glass, she suddenly reflected with a shudder:

"To-morrow I shall be dead. Dead! Never to talk, never to think, never to be seen again! And I shall know nothing of it all."

She gazed searchingly at her face, as if she had never seen it before. She examined her eyes with special interest, and to her surprise discovered many fresh traits and characteristics in her features. It was as if she were contemplating a stranger or a new acquaintance:

"That is really myself there in the glass," she soliloquised. "How strange it is to study one's own face. Without the mirror we should never be able to see our own selves. Everyone would know what we were like except ourselves."

She drew her braids of luxuriant hair over her bosom, following with her eyes every gesture, pose and movement.

"How pretty I am," she thought. "And to-morrow I shall be lying there a corpse."

She turned towards the bed and pictured herself stretched out, as white as the sheets.

"Dead! In a week this face, these eyes, these cheeks, will be only a putrid mass in a coffin buried in the ground."

Her heart was wrung by terrible anguish.

The bright rays of the sun flooded the landscape. The cool air of morning came in at the window. She sat down and meditated.

Dead! It was as if the world were about to fade away from her ken. But no! nothing in the world would be changed, not even the things in her room. Yes; even her room would remain unchanged, with the same bed, the same chairs, the same toilet table; but she herself would be gone for ever, and except perhaps her mother, no one would mourn for her. Someone would say: "What a pretty girl she was, that little Yvette!" Nothing more. And when she looked at her hand, which was resting on the arm of her chair, she thought again of the black, putrid mass of corruption, into which her flesh would dissolve. Again a shudder of horror swept over her. She could not conceive how it was that she could vanish without the whole world being annihilated, so much a part of it did she feel, of the countryside, the air, the sun, of life itself.

A burst of laughter rose from the garden, the sound of voices calling to one another, the bubbling gaiety with which a house party begins. She recognised the deep voice of Monsieur de Belvigne singing:—

"I wait beneath thy window,
Oh! deign, love, to appear!"

Without thinking, she went to the window and looked out, and her appearance was greeted with applause. All five were there, with two other men whom she did not recognise. She withdrew hastily, tortured by the thought that these men had come to amuse themselves with the courtesan, her mother.

The luncheon bell sounded.

"I will show them how to die," she said to herself.

She went down with a firm step, almost with the resolu-

tion of a Christian martyr entering the arena to face the hungry lions. She shook hands graciously, but with a hint of reserve in her smile.

"Well, Mam'zelle, are you feeling happier to-day?" asked Servigny.

She answered, with a strange severity in her voice:—

"To-day I mean to do all sorts of outrageous things. I'm in my Paris humour. So look out."

Then, turning to Monsieur de Belvigne:—

"You shall be my cavalier, my little Malvoisie. After luncheon, we'll all go to the fair at Marly."

The two new men were introduced, the Count de Tamine and the Marquis de Briquetot.

During luncheon, she hardly spoke. She was reserving her gaiety for the afternoon, so as to arouse no suspicion, in order that they might be all the more surprised at her act on the morrow, and say:—"Who would have thought it? She seemed so happy and pleased. Who knows what these little heads conceal?"

She would not allow herself to think of the evening, of the fatal hour, when all the others would be gathered on the terrace. To raise her spirits, she drank a good deal of wine and two small glasses of old brandy and she rose from table flushed, heated, excited, a little off her balance, and with a feeling of audacity, which made her ready to dare anything.

"Off we go!" she said.

She took Monsieur de Belvigne's arm and set the others in array:—

"Come, you are my regiment. Servigny, I appoint you sergeant. You will march on the right of the line. The Foreign Guard, our two exotics, the Prince and the Cavaliere, shall be our front rank, and the two recruits who have enlisted to-day shall bring up the rear. March!"

They set off. Servigny pretended to blow a bugle and the two newcomers to beat a drum.

Somewhat disconcerted, Monsieur de Belvigne whispered:—

"Mademoiselle Yvette, don't lose your head. You will end by compromising yourself."

"Not I; it is you who will be compromised, Raisiné. I don't care a rap for myself. It will be all over to-morrow. As for you, you shouldn't go about with girls like me."

As they passed through Bougival, they aroused the amazement of the passers-by. People turned to look at them; the inhabitants came to their doors; the passengers on the tram which runs between Rueil and Marly jeered at them. Some of the men who were standing on the platform between the carriages, cried out: "Duck them! Duck them!"

Yvette marched with a military step, holding Belvigne by the arm as if he were a prisoner. She did not laugh; her face was set and pale with a kind of sinister gaiety. Servigny varied his bugle-blowing with shouting out orders. The Prince and the Cavaliere were in high glee, convinced that their proceedings were both amusing and distinguished. The two young men beat their drums uninterruptedly. When they arrived at the fair-ground, they created a sensation. Girls cheered; young men grinned; a fat man, with his wife on his arm, said enviously:—

"That lot isn't bored, anyhow."

She made Belvigne bestride a wooden horse next to hers on a merry-go-round, while the rest of the detachment climbed up behind them on to other revolving chargers. When the turn was finished she refused to get down and made her escort take five rides in succession on the back of their nursery steeds, to the huge delight of the spectators who assailed them with chaff. Monsieur de Belvigne was looking pale and feeling sick, by the time he was allowed to alight.

Then she wandered about among the stalls. She insisted on all the men being weighed, in the midst of an admiring circle. She ordered them to buy absurd toys and carry them about. The Prince and the Cavaliere

began to think the jest had gone too far, but Servigny and the two drummers remained staunch.

At last they came to the end of the fair-ground. She scanned her followers curiously, with a vindictive gleam in her eyes; and a strange fancy seized her. She stood them in a row on the bank:

"Let him who loves me best leap into the water."

No one jumped. A mob collected behind them. Some women in white aprons stared in amazement; two troopers in red breeches laughed foolishly.

"So not one of you will venture in for my sake."

"Oh, well, here goes!" muttered Servigny, and he jumped into the river, splashing the water up to Yvette's feet. A buzz of astonished delight ran through the crowd.

The girl then picked up a small piece of wood and threw it into the water:

"Fetch it," she cried.

Servigny swam out and seizing the stick in his teeth like a dog, brought it in and climbing up the bank, he knelt and presented it to Yvette.

She took it.

"Good dog," she said, patting his head with approval.

A fat woman said indignantly:—

"Well, I never——"

Another said:—"A nice sort of game that."

A man declared:—

"You wouldn't catch me drenching myself for such a hussy."

She took Belvigne's arm again, and said straight to his face:—

"You are a goose, my dear man; you don't know what you have missed."

As they went homewards, she cast resentful glances at the passers-by.

"How stupid they all look," she said, and raising her eyes to her companion's face, she added: "And so do you."

Monsieur de Belvigne bowed. Turning round she saw that the Prince and the Cavaliere had vanished. Servigny, dripping and depressed, no longer blew the bugle, but walked with downcast air beside the two weary young men, who no longer beat the drum.

She laughed sardonically:

"You all seem to have had enough. But this is what you call amusing yourselves, isn't it? That's what you came for. I've given you some fun for your money."

She walked on in silence and all of a sudden Belvigne saw that she was crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked in amazement.

"Let me alone," she muttered; "it's nothing to do with you."

Like a fool, he insisted:

"Oh, Mademoiselle, do tell me what's the matter. Has anything upset you?"

"Oh, do shut up," she said impatiently.

Then a flood of unspeakable melancholy surged into her heart and she broke into such a storm of sobbing that she could not go any further. She covered her face with her hands. The spasms in her throat were so violent that she could hardly breathe. She was almost choked by her paroxysm of emotion.

Belvigne stood by her, absolutely bewildered, and saying over and over again:

"I don't know what's the matter."

Servigny came up and said sharply:

"Let's go back, mam'zelle. Don't let people see you crying in the street. Why do you do such outrageous things, if they only upset you?"

He took her arm and led her homeward. But when they came to the gate, she ran across the garden, up the stairs and locked herself into her room.

She did not appear till dinner time, when she came down looking pale and serious. The rest of the party, however, were in riotous spirits. Servigny was wearing a suit of workmen's clothes, which he had bought at a

stall: velveteen trousers, flannel shirt, waistcoat and blouse; and he imitated the accent of the common people.

Yvette was in a hurry for the meal to be over, for fear her courage should fail her. After coffee, she went back to her room. She heard the others chattering gaily under her window. The Cavaliere was indulging in risky jests and attempting gross and clumsy witticisms in a language foreign to him.

She listened in the depths of despair. Servigny, who was slightly intoxicated, imitated a tipsy workman, and addressed the Marquise as "Missus." Turning to Saval, he called out to him:—"Hi, boss!" and everyone laughed.

That settled the matter for Yvette. She took a sheet of notepaper and wrote:—

"Bougival, Sunday, 9 p.m.

"I die rather than become a kept woman.

"Yvette.

"P.S. Adieu, dear Mamma, forgive me."

Sealing the envelope she addressed it to Madame Obardi. Then she moved her long chair to the window, put a small table within reach of her hand and placed on it the large phial of chloroform with a handful of cotton wool beside it.

There was a climbing rose planted on the terrace, and its blossoms, clustering round her window, diffused a sweet and delicate perfume, which was wafted to her in fragrant sighs. She paused for a few moments to breathe it in. The moon was in its first quarter, and had tiny indentations on its left side. It swam serenely in the dark sky. Every now and then a feathery wisp of cloud passed across its face.

Yvette mused:

"I am going to die. I am going to die."

Her heart, swollen with suppressed emotion, bursting with anguish, rose in her throat as though to stifle her.

She had a yearning for someone to rescue her, love her, absolve her.

Servigny's voice floated up. He was telling an improper story and was interrupted by incessant peals of laughter. The Marquise was the most hilarious of them all:

"Ha! ha! no one can tell these stories as he does," she kept on saying.

Yvette unstoppered the phial and poured a little of the liquid on the wool. A strange, strong, sweet odour filled the room. She put the piece of wool to her lips and inhaled the powerful fumes, which made her catch her breath and cough.

Closing her mouth, she inhaled again, drinking in tiny draughts of the deadly vapour, shutting her eyes and forcing her mind to exclude all thought and consciousness.

Her bosom at first seemed to expand; her soul, but now weighed down with grief, became as light as air, its burden borne away as if on wings. A tingling and agreeable sensation pervaded her whole body, coursing along her limbs to the tips of her toes and fingers; it possessed her like a vague intoxication, or a mild fever.

She saw that the wool was dry and felt surprised that she was not yet dead. Her senses seemed, on the contrary, to be more acute, more subtle, more alive. She heard every word spoken on the veranda. Prince Kravalow was describing how he had killed an Austrian general in a duel. She heard the rural sounds that strike the ear from afar in the night-time; the intermittent barking of a dog, the staccato croaking of frogs, the gentle murmur of leaves.

She took the phial again and soaking a small piece of wool inhaled once more. For some moments she felt nothing; then the same pleasant and soothing sensation returned. Twice she poured chloroform on to the wool, eager for that sense of physical and mental well-being,

that dreamy semi-consciousness, in which her soul drifted hither and thither.

It seemed to her as if she no longer possessed a bodily frame. It was as if flesh, bones, limbs, had imperceptibly melted away. The chloroform had made her body like an empty shell, leaving nothing but the faculty of thought, which had become more alert, more comprehensive, more unconfined than she had ever known it.

A thousand forgotten details came back to her, slight incidents of her childhood, trifles pleasing to remember. The most diverse ideas arose suddenly in her mind, which had become abnormally active, imagining countless adventures, wandering in the mazes of the past, lost in sanguine visions of the future. Unfettered, free from care, the mere act of thinking was exquisite bliss; every excursion into the realms of unreality was a divine delight.

Voices still haunted her, but she could no longer distinguish the words. They seemed to her fraught with new meaning. She was straying deeper and deeper into a strange, new, fairy country.

Now she was in a great ship, skirting the shores of a lovely realm gay with flowers; and she could hear the inhabitants talking loudly. Then she found herself on land; how, she knew not; and Servigny in the guise of a prince came to escort her to a bull-fight. The streets were full of men and women conversing with one another; and nothing that they said surprised her, for she seemed to know them personally. In reality, she was listening in her drugged reverie to the voices of her mother's friends, laughing and talking on the terrace.

Then everything became confused. She awoke in delicious bewilderment. She could hardly remember where she was. She was not dead yet, she found! She felt so exquisitely soothed, in such a state of mental and physical well-being, that she was no longer impatient for the end. She was content to go on living for ever in that ineffable bliss.

Her breathing now was slow and calm. She gazed at

the moon above the trees. Some subtle change had come over her. She saw things in a different light. The chloroform, by releasing her mind and body, had allayed her pain. She no longer wished to die.

Why should she not live and be loved and enjoy life? The future now seemed easy and assured. Life was a pleasant thing, full of delightful possibilities. But as she desired to go on dreaming, she again poured the magic fluid on to the wool and again inhaled it, at times removing the poison from her nostrils, lest she should absorb it to excess and die. Under the vision-compelling influence of the drug, she seemed in fancy in the open country. She gazed up at the moon and saw therein, hovering in the midst of the sky, the face of a woman who began to sing in a well-known voice the "Alleluia d'Amour."

It was the Marquise who had gone indoors and sat down at the piano.

Yvette now seemed to have wings. She flew through the clear night over woods and streams, joyously spreading and beating her pinions, borne on the breeze as if sped by loving hands. Gliding luxuriously through the atmosphere, she felt its caress upon her face. Her flight was so rapid that she could not see what lay beneath her, till presently she found herself sitting on the margin of a lake, with a fishing rod in her hand.

Something tugged at her line and she drew out of the water a magnificent pearl necklace which she had once coveted. This capture caused her no surprise. She watched Servigny, who by some unknown means had joined her at the fishing, as he landed a wooden horse.

Again she recovered consciousness and heard voices calling to her from below.

"Put out your light," exclaimed her mother.

The request was facetiously repeated by Servigny in his mock plebeian accents.

The rest took up the refrain:

"Mam'zelle Yvette, put out your light."

She again poured chloroform on the wool, but, as she no longer desired to die, she held it away from her face and breathed only the uncontaminated air, while at the same time the asphyxiating odour of the drug was diffused through the room. She knew that someone would presently come up to her, and she waited, relaxing her limbs completely, as if she were dead.

"I feel rather anxious," said the Marquise. "The little idiot has gone to sleep leaving the light on her table. I will send Clémence to put it out and shut the window, which has been left wide open."

Presently the maid rapped at the door:

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle."

As there was no reply, she said:

"Mademoiselle, the Marquise wishes you to put out your light and shut the window."

Clémence waited a little longer and then knocked more loudly, crying:

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle."

As Yvette still did not answer, the maid went down to report to the Marquise.

"Mademoiselle must have gone to sleep; her door is locked and I cannot wake her."

"But we can't leave her like that!" said Madame Obardi.

At Servigny's suggestion, they all collected under the window and shouted in chorus:—

"Hip! hip! hurrah! Mam'zelle Yvette!"

Their shout rose in the still night, soaring through the translucent moonlit air, sweeping over the dreaming countryside, dying away in the distance like the sound of a departing train.

"I hope nothing has happened," said the Marquise, as Yvette did not answer, "I am beginning to be alarmed."

Servigny picked some red roses and half-open buds from the rose tree climbing along the wall and began to throw them into the room through the open window. As the first flower hit her, Yvette jumped and almost uttered

a cry. Some fell on her dress and on her hair; some flew over her head and covered the bed with a shower of blossoms.

"Come, Yvette, do answer," said the Marquise in an agonised voice.

"There's certainly something wrong," said Servigny, "I will climb up to the balcony."

"Oh, I say," said the Cavaliere indignantly, "that would be gross favouritism. I protest. That's much too easy a way of securing a rendezvous, and at this time of the night, too."

All the other men thought that the girl was playing a practical joke and cried in chorus:

"We object. It's a put-up affair. He shan't go up; he shan't go up."

"All the same, someone must go up and see," the Marquise declared excitedly.

Striking an attitude, the Prince said:

"She favours the Duke. We are betrayed."

"Let's toss who goes up," suggested the Cavaliere, taking a napoleon from his pocket.

He began with the Prince, who said:

"Tails."

It was heads.

The Prince then spun the coin, saying to Saval:—

"Call."

"Heads," said Saval.

It was tails.

The Prince then spun the coin for the rest of the party, all of whom guessed wrong. Only Servigny remained.

"He's cheating," he declared insolently.

The Prince put his hand on his heart and handed the coin to his rival.

"Toss for yourself, my dear Duke."

Servigny spun and called: "Heads."

It was tails.

He bowed, and pointing to the pillar supporting the balcony, said:

"Up you go, Prince."

The Prince glanced round him with a perturbed air.

"What are you looking for?" cried the Cavaliere.

"Well, I . . . should rather like . . . a ladder."

There was a general laugh.

"We'll give you a leg up," said Saval.

He lifted him in his powerful arms.

"Hang on to the balcony."

The Prince accordingly clung to the railing, and when Saval let him go, he remained suspended, his legs dangling in the air. Servigny seized his feet, which frantically sought a resting place, and pulled with all his might. The Prince let go and he fell plump on Monsieur de Belvigne, who had run up to help him.

"Whose turn next?" asked Servigny.

No one volunteered.

"Come, Belvigne, be a man."

"Thank you, I don't want to break my neck."

"Well, you, Cavaliere, you must be used to scaling walls."

"You may have my turn, my dear Duke."

"H'm; I'm not so keen about it as all that."

Servigny, with a strategic eye, clambered up the pillar. With a bound he caught on to the balcony, pulled himself up by his wrists, secured a footing, and climbed over the railing. The spectators, gazing up at him, gave him a cheer. But he re-appeared immediately, exclaiming:

"Come up; come up at once; Yvette is unconscious."

The Marquise uttered a shrill cry and rushed up the stairs.

The girl kept her eyes shut and pretended to be dead. Her mother darted into the room, distracted, and flung herself on her daughter.

"Oh, what is the matter with her? What is the matter?"

Servigny picked up the bottle of chloroform, which had fallen to the floor.

"She is asphyxiated," he said.

He put his ear to her heart:

"But she is not dead. We can revive her. Have you any sal volatile?"

"What, Monsieur?" asked the horrified maid.

"Some sedative?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Bring it at once and leave the door open to allow a draught."

The Marquise was on her knees sobbing,

"Yvette! Yvette! my little girl, listen to me; answer me. Yvette, my child. God in Heaven! What can be the matter with her?"

The men ran hither and thither distractedly, fetching water, towels, glasses, vinegar.

"She ought to be undressed," someone suggested.

The Marquise, who had quite lost her head, tried to undress the girl; but she did not know what she was doing. Her hands fumbled helplessly and she moaned:

"I can't. I can't."

The maid returned with a medicine bottle, which Servigny opened. He poured half its contents on a handkerchief. This he put to Yvette's nose.

Yvette promptly choked.

"Good, she is breathing," he said, "there's not much wrong."

He bathed her temples, cheeks, and neck, with the pungent liquid. Then he signed to the maid to unlace the girl's corsets, and when she had on only a chemise and petticoat he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed, himself trembling with emotion at the fragrance of her half clad body, the touch of her limbs, the half revealed bosom, quivering beneath the touch of his lips. When she was put to bed, he rose as pale as death.

"She will come to," he said. "It is nothing."

He had heard her regular breathing. At the sight of the other men with their eyes fixed on Yvette, he felt a thrill of jealous anger and advanced towards them:

"Gentlemen, there are too many of us in this room.

Will you kindly leave Monsieur Saval and me alone with the Marquise?"

He spoke in a dry, imperative tone. The others at once obeyed.

Madame Obardi threw herself into her lover's arms, looked up into his eyes, and exclaimed:

"Save her. Oh! save her."

Looking round, Servigny saw a letter on the table. He seized it with a swift movement and read the address.

He understood the situation at once and thought to himself:—

"Perhaps the Marquise had better not see this."

Tearing open the envelope he read at a glance the two lines which it contained:—

"I die rather than become a kept woman.

"Yvette.

"P.S. Adieu, dear Mamma. Forgive me."

"The devil!" he reflected, "this wants thinking over," and he put the letter in his pocket.

Then he went to the bed. It struck him that the girl had recovered consciousness, but did not dare to own it, for shame and humiliation, and because she was afraid of being questioned.

The Marquise had fallen on her knees and was weeping with her head resting on the bed.

"A doctor," she moaned, "we must send for a doctor."

Servigny, who had exchanged a few words aside with Saval, said to her:

"No; she's all right. Look here, go away for a minute, just for a minute, and I promise that she shall be ready to kiss you when you come back."

The Baron raised Madame Obardi from her knees, and led her away.

Servigny sat down by the bedside and taking Yvette's hand said:

"Mam'zelle, listen to me."

She did not answer. She felt so deliciously warm and

comfortable lying there that she wanted never to move again, never to speak, simply to remain thus forever. She had never known such a sense of well-being, such a feeling of infinite bliss. The warm night air touched her face with its light, soft, exquisite, almost imperceptible breath. It was a caress like a kiss of the breeze, like the slow, refreshing waving of a fan made of all the leaves of the forest, all the shadows of the night, of the mist on the river, and of all the flowers too, for the roses that strewed the floor and the bed and the roses climbing up to the balcony mingled their languishing fragrance with the wholesome savour of the night wind. She drank deep draughts of that balmy air. Her eyes were closed, her soul was at peace under the still lingering influence of the narcotic; she no longer wished to die; on the contrary, she felt a powerful, imperious desire for happiness, in whatever form, a yearning to love and to be loved.

"Mam'zelle Yvette, listen to me," repeated Servigny.

She decided to open her eyes.

"How could you do such a silly thing?" he asked, seeing her revived.

"My poor Muscade," she murmured, "I was so unhappy."

"I daresay; and a lot of good this has done you," said he, patting her hand paternally. "Come, will you promise never to behave like this again?"

She did not answer, except with a slight nod accompanied by the ghost of a smile.

He took from his pocket the letter which he had found on the table.

"Do you want your mother to see this?"

She shook her head.

He could think of nothing more to say. The situation did not seem to lead to any suitable issue.

"My dear child," he murmured presently, "however painful the facts, one has to accept them. I understand your feelings and I promise you . . ."

"How kind you are," she faltered.

Neither of them spoke for a while. He sat gazing at her. There was a tender look in her eyes, as if her resolution was weakening; and suddenly she raised her arms, as if to draw him to her. He leant over her, feeling that she desired him, and their lips met.

They remained thus a long time with closed eyes, till, fearing to lose control of himself, Servigny tried to break away. She smiled on him now, a smile of genuine love, and with her hands on his shoulders, she held him fast.

"Let me fetch your mother now," he said.

"Just a moment," she whispered. "I am so happy."

After a silence, she said so softly as to be almost inaudible:

"You will really love me?"

He knelt by the bed and kissed the hand which she surrendered to him.

"I adore you."

Footsteps were heard at the door. He jumped up and cried out in his usual satirical tones:

"You may come in. She's all right now."

The Marquise rushed to her child with open arms, embracing her frantically and covering her face with tears, while Servigny, his heart aflame, his whole frame thrilling with emotion, went out on to the balcony to breathe the fresh air of night. As he stood there he hummed:

"Woman is changeful ever.
When can you trust her? Never!"

II. THE OLIVE GROVE

I

THE small Provençal port of Garandou is situated at the head of the Bay of Pisca, which lies between Marseilles and Toulon.

Catching sight of the Abbé Vilbois' boat on its way home from the fishing grounds, the men at the village came down to the shore to lend a hand in beaching it. The Abbé was alone in the boat, and he handled his oars with the skill of a born sailor and with an energy surprising in a man of fifty-eight. His sleeves were turned up over his muscular forearms; the top buttons of his cassock were undone and the skirts tucked up between his knees. His three-cornered hat lay beside him on the thwart, and his head was protected from the sun's rays by a cork bell-helmet with a white cover. He looked like one of those priests of tropic climes, stout fellows, not without eccentricity, who suggest a capacity for adventure rather than for priestly functions.

From time to time he stopped to cast a glance over his shoulder and make sure of his landing-place. Then, resuming his oars, he rowed with strong rhythmic strokes, to show these Southern lubbers yet again how men of the North handle their sculls.

Under the compulsion of his vigorous strokes, the boat reached the shore and glided on its keel up the sloping

sand, as though bent upon reaching the top of the beach. When it came to a stop, the five men, who had been watching the boat's approach, came down with obvious pleasure to give their priest a friendly greeting.

"Well, sir, what luck?" one of them asked in a strong Provençal accent.

The Abbé Vilbois shipped his oars, removed his cork helmet, put on his three-cornered hat, turned down his sleeves, and buttoned up his cassock. With this attention to the proprieties he resumed his pastoral dignity.

"Not too bad. Three bass, two muraenas, and some *girelles*."

The fat bass, the flat-headed repulsive snake-like muraenas, the *girelles* with their stripes of violet and orange-gold, lay in the bottom of the boat, and the five fishermen came nearer and bending over the gunwale, inspected the catch with the air of experts.

"I'll take them up to your cottage," one of them volunteered.

"Thank you, my man."

The priest shook hands all round and set off homewards, with one of the fishermen following him. The others stayed behind and busied themselves about the boat.

The Abbé walked with long, slow strides. Energy and dignity characterised his bearing. He was still heated from his exertions at the oars, and whenever he passed under the shade of the olive trees, he removed his hat, so as to allow the evening air, which was tempered by a slight breeze from the open sea, to play upon his head, upon his stiff, close-cropped, white hair, and upon the square-set countenance, which suggested the soldier rather than the priest. Presently he came in sight of the village, which was situated on rising ground in the midst of a wide flat valley-bottom, sloping towards the sea.

It was a July evening. The declining sun had almost reached the serrated crest of the distant hills. The dazzling rays fell upon the white road, which was thick with dust. The priest's shadow, prolonged by the sloping

beams, fell diagonally across the path. His three-cornered hat, magnified to an inordinate size, cast on the adjoining fields a huge black blot which danced now on the tree trunks, now on the ground, now in and out amongst the olives.

In summer these southern roads have a mantle of dust, as fine as flour. Disturbed by the Abbé's feet, it rose like a cloud of smoke about his cassock, and covered the skirts with a grey layer, gradually increasing in density. He was cooler now. Thrusting his hands into his pockets he walked on, with the strong, steady gait of a mountaineer ascending a slope. His calm eyes scanned the village, his own village, where he had been for twenty years parish priest. He had chosen it himself; and had obtained the charge of it as a special favour. In it he proposed to end his days. Its cottages lay on the slope of the hill, in the form of a great pyramid, the apex formed by the church with its two square, ill-matched towers of brown stone, their ancient outlines suggesting the defences of a stronghold rather than the belfries of a sacred edifice.

The Abbé was pleased with his catch. In the eyes of his parishioners, it constituted yet another small triumph on the part of one, whose special claim to their respect lay in the fact that he had probably, despite his age, the finest muscular development of any man in that countryside. He could snip a flower-stalk with a pistol bullet; he practised feats of swordmanship with his neighbour the tobacconist who was an old master-at-arms, and he was the finest swimmer along that coast. These innocent vanities were now his greatest pleasures in life.

There had been a time, when he was a well-known figure in the social world. But Baron de Vilbois, that mirror of elegance, had in his thirty-second year, taken Holy Orders, in consequence of an unhappy love affair.

The ancient Picardy family, Royalist and Catholic, from which he sprang, had for many centuries sent its scions to the army, the magistrature, or the priesthood. His earliest impulse, at the prompting of his mother, was

to take Holy Orders, but reconsidering this on his father's advice, he decided instead to go to Paris, study law, and thereafter find some serious employment about the Courts. While he was still engaged in his studies, his father succumbed to pneumonia contracted while shooting in the marshes, and his mother, who was overwhelmed by grief at his loss, died shortly afterwards. Having thus suddenly inherited a substantial fortune, he renounced his project of making a career for himself and surrendered to the charms of a life of idle opulence.

He was attractive and intelligent, but his mind was bounded by certain fixed beliefs, traditions and principles which, like his muscles, he had inherited from ancestral squires of Picardy. He created a good impression, was well received in serious circles, and enjoyed life like a popular young man of sound principles and ample means.

Then came the unexpected. At the house of a friend he met on several occasions a young actress, who, while still in her novitiate at the Conservatoire, had made a startlingly successful first appearance at the Odéon. Baron de Vilbois fell in love with her with the violence and headlong passion of a man, whose natural temperament leaves him at the mercy of his ideals. This sudden passion was conceived when he saw her steeped in the glamour of the romantic rôle in which she had, on the day of her début, scored so notable a triumph.

She was pretty, but had an ingrained perversity of character. Her face wore an innocent and childlike expression, which he called her angel look. She succeeded in reducing him to abject slavery. She transformed him into one of those ecstatic madmen, whom the glance of a woman's eyes, the flutter of her skirts can thrust into the fiery furnace of inextinguishable passion. He made her leave the stage. She came to live with him and for four years he loved her with ever-increasing ardour. In spite of his noble birth and the aristocratic traditions of his race, he would eventually have made her his wife, had he not one day discovered that she had for long been

deceiving him with the friend who had first brought them together.

This revelation was the more grievous from the fact that she was expecting to become a mother, and he was only awaiting the birth of the child as a deciding factor in his intention to marry her. He had come upon some letters in a drawer, and confronting her with these proofs, he reproached her for her faithlessness, her treachery, her shamelessness, with all the brutality of his semi-barbaric nature.

She was, however, a true child of the Paris streets, as impudent as she was immodest. Convinced of the sureness of her hold both on the Baron and his rival and endued moreover with the hardihood of these women of the lower class, who in sheer effrontery perch themselves on the top of the barricades, she defied him and flung back his insults. When he lifted his hand to strike her, she paraded her figure before him.

He checked himself. Pale with the thought that the polluted flesh, the vile body, of so foul a creature, enshrined his child, he hurled himself at her, intending to destroy the pair of them, to annihilate in a single blow his twofold shame. Overwhelmed with terror she gave herself up for lost. Felled by a blow of his fist, she saw his heel ready to crush her and the budding life within her, and as she stretched out her hands to ward off his fury, she cried out:

"Don't kill me. The child is not yours. It is his."

He started back, in such a state of stupefaction and consternation that, like that menacing heel, his wrath was stayed.

"You . . . you . . . What's that you say?" he stammered.

She had caught the threat of murder, not only in his eyes, but in his terrifying gestures. Crazed with fear she said again:

"It is not yours. It is his."

Utterly bewildered, he muttered between clenched teeth:

"The child?"

"Yes."

"Liar!"

Again he raised his foot to stamp on her. She had struggled to her knees, and was trying to move back out of his reach, but all the time she kept faltering:

"I tell you it is his. If it was yours, shouldn't I have had it long ago?"

This argument struck home with all the force of truth. In one of those lightning flashes of thought, which combine every process of reasoning with illuminating lucidity and are at once precise, irrefutable, conclusive, and irresistible, he was possessed by the conviction that he was not the father of that wretched unborn brat. In a moment his fury abated. Tranquil, calm, almost appeased, he renounced his intention of destroying this wanton creature.

In quieter tones he said:

"Get up. Off with you. Never let me see you again."

Utterly defeated, she docilely removed herself, and he never saw her again. He too departed. He made his way southwards, to the land of sunshine, and finally came to a halt at a village situated on a knoll in a broad valley, by the shores of the Mediterranean. He found, facing the sea, an inn, which attracted him, and taking a room there, he went no further. Here he remained for eighteen months in complete isolation. Sunk in mortification and despair, he was for ever haunted by devastating memories of the woman who had betrayed him; he recalled her charm, her fascination, her mysterious witchery, and he never ceased yearning for her presence and for her caresses.

As he wandered among the Provençal valleys, where the sun's rays filtered down through the grey-green olive leaves, his tortured brain was racked by these obsessions. This melancholy solitude had however the effect of bringing back to him the pious predilections of his youth. Very gently, with their ardour a little sobered, they stole

back into his heart. His religion, which had once appealed to him as a shelter against the unknown perils of life, he now viewed as a refuge from its tortures and deceptions. He had never lost his habit of prayer, and in his desolation he clung to it. He would often go at twilight and kneel in the darkening church where the lamp, the sacred guardian of the sanctuary, the symbol of the Divine Presence, shed its solitary ray from the recesses of the choir. To his God he confided his anguish, to Him he told his troubles, asking of Him pity, succour, protection, consolation. The increasing fervour wherewith he repeated his daily orisons, was evidence of the growing depth of the emotion which prompted them. Bruised and corroded by his passion for a woman, his heart still remained tender, impressionable, eager for love. Constant in prayer, living a hermit's life, and growing ever more assiduous in the practice of piety, he surrendered himself to the secret communion, which unites devout souls to the Saviour, Who comforts the wretched and draws them to Him. The mystic love of God entered into him, and his baser affections were subdued. His thoughts turned again to the projects of his early youth, when he had dreamed of giving his virgin heart to the Church. He now decided to offer upon the altar his broken life. He accordingly took Holy Orders.

Family interest procured for him the appointment of parish priest to the Provençal village, in which chance had cast him up. He consecrated the greater part of his wealth to charitable works, only retaining sufficient to enable him to be of practical assistance to the poor of his parish during the remainder of his life. Thus he found a refuge in a tranquil existence of pious observances and of devotion to his fellow-creatures.

His views were narrow, but he was a good priest, although in his manner of guiding his flock there was more of the soldier than the pastor. The forest of life is full of by-ways which lead us astray. Erring humanity wanders blindfold in a labyrinth of instincts, preferences

and desires. He drove rather than led, his people into the right path. But in his new sphere he still retained many of his former tastes. Violent exercise appealed to him as strongly as ever. He enjoyed the nobler forms of sport and the practice of arms. But he shrank from all women with the instinctive fear of a child, when confronted with some danger, which it cannot understand.

II

THE fisherman who followed the Abbé had the true Southerner's irresistible desire to talk. But the Abbé kept his flock in good order, and the man was afraid to begin. At last, however, he ventured a remark.

"You are quite comfortable in your little shanty, sir, I hope?"

This cottage of the Abbé's was one of those tiny buildings, in which people from Provençal towns and villages take up their quarters in the summer for the sake of the country air. His official residence was built up against the walls of the church, right in the centre of the parish, and was uncomfortably small. He had accordingly rented this cottage in a field at five minutes' distance from the parsonage. Even in summer he did not occupy it regularly, but spent a few days there from time to time, in order to immerse himself in the peace of the country and also to practise pistol-shooting.

"Yes, thank you," he replied to the fisherman. "I am quite happy there."

The little, pink-washed cottage came into view. It stood in an unwalled field, which had been planted with olive trees, and it looked as if it had sprung up like a Provençal mushroom. The branches and leaves of the olive trees cast a dappled pattern of striped and criss-crossed shadows upon the walls of the house. Outside the door his buxom housekeeper was laying a small table with methodical slowness, making a journey into the

house for each separate article she placed upon it, the cloth, the plate, the napkin, the tumbler and the hunk of bread. She wore the little Arlesian bonnet, a cone of black silk or velvet trimmed with a white mushroom-shaped ornament. When the Abbé arrived within earshot, he called out to her. She looked round and recognised her master.

"Oh, it's you, sir, is it?"

"Yes. I've brought home a fine catch. You must set to work and fry a bass for me. Cook it in butter, just butter, you understand."

The servant came nearer and with the eye of a connoisseur examined the fish which the boatman was carrying.

"There is a chicken and rice all ready for you," she said.

"Never mind. Fish don't improve with keeping. I'll indulge in a little orgy for once. I don't often do it. And after all it isn't a mortal sin."

The woman picked out the bass from the rest of the fish. As she turned away with it, she said:

"There has been a man asking for you. He came three times."

"A man? What sort of man?" the Abbé asked with indifference.

"Well, his looks were no recommendation."

"A beggar?"

"I daresay.. He might be that. To me he had more the look of a *maoufatan.*"

The Abbé Vilbois laughed when he heard this Provençal word, signifying malefactor or vagabond. He knew that Marguerite, who was a timorous soul, could never live in the cottage without imagining all the time, and especially at night, that they were going to be murdered.

The Abbé dismissed the sailor with a few coppers, and then, having preserved the dainty habits of his unregenerate days, he went to wash his face and hands.

Marguerite was in the kitchen scraping the bass from

tail to head with a knife, and the scales, slightly tinged with blood, came away like tiny, silver sequins.

"There he is again," she called out.

The Abbé turned towards the road, and to be sure there was the man, slowly approaching the house. Even from a distance his clothes seemed to be in a dreadful condition.

"Upon my soul," reflected the Abbé, "Marguerite is right. He has all the appearance of a *maoufatan*."

While awaiting the stranger, he continued to smile at the recollection of his handmaiden's terror.

The unknown man approached with his hands in his pockets. He strolled leisurely along, and kept his eyes fixed on the priest. He was young, and had a fair, curling beard, and his hair waved under the brim of a soft felt hat, which was so dirty and battered, that the original colour and shape were undiscernible. He wore a long brown overcoat; the bottoms of his trouser legs were frayed, and he had on his feet a pair of rope-soled canvas shoes, which gave him the furtive, disquieting gait of a prowling thief. Arrived within a few paces of the Abbé, he raised his hat with a touch of the theatrical, and revealed a face, which, though branded with the marks of debauchery, was not ill-favoured. The crown of his head was bald, which in a man, whose age certainly did not exceed twenty-five, was a sign either of an enfeebled constitution or of precocious vice.

The priest, too, took off his hat. He was intuitively aware that this person was neither the ordinary vagabond or out-of-work, nor the habitual offender, who drifts from prison to prison, and can lay his tongue to naught save the mysterious jargon of the jail-bird.

"Good-evening, Monsieur," said the stranger.

The Abbé replied with a simple "Good evening," not wishing to use the word *Monsieur* to this dubious-looking tatterdemalion. The priest and the young man looked each other up and down, and under the vagabond's scrutiny the Abbé Vilbois experienced a sensation of

discomfort. He felt as if he were confronted with some mysterious hostility, and he was seized by one of those curious presentiments, which send a thrill of apprehension through the human frame.

At last the vagabond broke the silence.

"Well, do you remember me?"

"Remember you?" replied the Abbé in great astonishment. "Certainly not. I don't know you at all."

"Ah, you don't know me at all. Just take another look at me."

"It's no use my looking at you. I've never set eyes on you before."

"That is true," the other assented in ironic tones. "But I am going to show you someone, whom you will have no difficulty in recognising."

He put on his hat and unbuttoned his overcoat, revealing his bare chest. A red belt was fastened round his lean waist and served to keep his trousers in position. Out of his pocket he took an envelope, mottled with every possible variety of stain, one of those preposterous envelopes, treasured by wandering outcasts in the lining of their clothes, and containing documents, genuine or forged, stolen or honestly come by, which are to their owners precious guarantees of personal liberty against the patrolling policeman. From it he drew forth a photograph of the old-fashioned cabinet size. It was yellow and faded, having been carried for many a day in contact with the defiling warmth of his body. He raised the photograph to the level of his face and then said:

"What about this one?"

The Abbé came two steps nearer. He turned pale with consternation, for the portrait was his own. It had been taken for the woman whom he had loved long ago. He was too bewildered to reply, and the vagabond pressed his question.

"Do you recognise it?"

"I do," faltered the priest.

"Who is it?"

"It is myself."

"It is really you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well then, look at me and at your likeness. Look at the two of us side by side."

The miserable Abbé had already realized that these two faces, the one in the photograph and the mocking countenance beside it, were as like as two brothers. Still he did not understand.

"Tell me what you want of me," he stammered.

In venomous tones, the stranger replied:

"What do I want of you? What I want is that you should first of all acknowledge me."

"Acknowledge you? But who are you?"

"Who am I? Ask any passer-by, ask your servant, ask the mayor of this place. Show him this photograph, and I tell you he will laugh. Ah! you don't want to admit that I am your son, my reverend papa."

The elder man raised his arms to heaven with the gesture of a biblical patriarch in despair.

"It is not true," he groaned.

The young man came up close to him, so that they stood face to face.

"Oh indeed, not true, isn't it? None of your lies, my friend. Understand that."

The expression on his face was menacing. His fists were clenched. His voice rang out with such conviction that the Abbé, as he yielded ground before him, wondered whether it was himself or the stranger who was mistaken. But again he asserted,

"I never had a child."

"Or a mistress either, I suppose," the other retorted.

With courage and dignity the Abbé replied in three words:

"A mistress, yes."

"And when you sent her away, was she not about to become a mother?"

At these words the ancient anger, which he had

smothered twenty-five years before, blazed up again. It had never been fully extinguished; through the years it had lain in the depths of the lover's heart, where he had walled it up, building over it a crypt of faith, of resignation, of renunciation. But in one moment the flames broke through. Beside himself he cried out:

"I turned her away because she was unfaithful to me. The child was of another man's begetting. Had it not been so, I should have killed her, and you along with her."

The young man was taken aback by the Abbé's vehemence. It was his turn to be surprised, and his reply was couched in more subdued tones.

"Who told you that you were not the child's father?"

"She, she herself, as she defied me."

The vagabond did not dispute this statement. He merely remarked, with the casual air of a ruffian who is giving his verdict on a case:

"Well, it was mamma's mistake. She was bluffing you, that's all."

His outburst of rage having subsided, the Abbé became more master of himself.

"Who told you that you were my son?" he questioned him.

"My mother. On her deathbed. If you want more evidence, look at this."

Again he held out the photograph. The Abbé took it and slowly, minutely, compared his old likeness with the face of this unknown tramp. His heart was brimming over with anguish. But he could doubt no longer. The man who stood before him was in very truth his son.

His soul was wrung with agony, with inexpressible emotion that tortured him, like remorse for a sin committed long ago. With the help of his actual knowledge and his own conjectures, he recalled the brutal scene of that separation. It was to save her life, which was threatened by the man whose pride she had outraged, that the deceitful and perfidious woman had hurled this

lie at him. The lie had done its work. And a child, his child, had been born, and had grown up into this squalid tramp, who stank of vice, as a he-goat stinks of animalism.

"Will you take a turn with me," said the Abbé, "so as to get the matter a little clearer?"

"Why certainly," he sneered. "That is the very thing I have come for."

They walked side by side through the olive grove. The sun had set, and the sudden chill that comes with twilight to these Mediterranean shores, descended on the countryside like a cold invisible shroud. The Abbé shivered. Raising his eyes suddenly, as he was wont to do, while officiating at Divine Service, he saw all around and above him, quivering between him and the heavens, the grey-green foliage of the sacred tree, whose tenuous shadow had screened the greatest of all agonies, Christ's one and only manifestation of weakness.

A brief, despairing prayer gushed from him, not in spoken words, but framed with that inner voice, which does not pass the lips, the voice wherewith the believer implores his Saviour to succour him.

"Then your mother is dead?" he asked, turning to his son.

When he said these words, his heart was wrung with yet another pang. He felt that strange, physical agony of a man who cannot forget, a cruel reminder of the torture he had once undergone. Or, now that she was dead, was it not rather a thrill of that brief intoxicating youthful bliss, of which no trace remained in his heart, save the scar of an ancient wound?

"Yes, sir. My mother is dead," replied the young man.

"Was it long ago?"

"Three years."

A fresh suspicion flashed across the priest's mind.

"Why didn't you come to see me sooner?"

The young man hesitated a moment before replying.

"I hadn't a chance. There were . . . h'm . . . obstacles. But will you pardon me, if I postpone my confidences for

a little. I shall make them as detailed as you please. But in the meantime I must tell you I have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning."

The Abbé was smitten by a sudden shock of compassion. He stretched out his hands and said:

"My poor boy."

The young man's slender trembling fingers were clasped by the strong hands held out to him. He replied, with the air of cynical mockery, which was habitual with him:

"That's all right. I reckon we'll come to an understanding after all."

The Abbé turned towards the house.

"Let us go in to dinner," he said, and he suddenly thought with an instinctive thrill of strange, confused pleasure, of the fine fish he had so opportunely caught, and of Marguerite's chicken and rice. The two dishes would make a splendid meal for the wretched youth.

Marguerite had by this time become uneasy and was inclined to be peevish. She was waiting in front of the door.

"Marguerite," the Abbé called out, "take the table into the dining-room and lay covers for two. As quickly as possible, please."

Such was Marguerite's consternation at the idea of her master dining in the company of such an unmistakable ruffian that she stood paralysed; so the Abbé set to work himself, and began to remove the knives and forks into the room, which occupied the entire ground floor of the house. Five minutes later he and the vagabond were seated opposite each other, with a tureen of steaming cabbage-soup between them.

III

THE broth was ladled out, and the visitor set to without delay. He plied his spoon busily and swallowed down his soup with avidity. But the Abbé had no appetite.

He sipped slowly the savoury liquid, but left the bread in his plate untouched.

"What name do you go by?" he suddenly asked.

The other laughed. The process of satisfying his hunger had raised his spirits.

"Paternity unknown," he said. "So the only family name I have is that of my mother, which doubtless you have not forgotten. I have, however, two Christian names which, I may venture to say, do not suit me at all: Philippe Auguste."

The Abbé had a feeling of constriction in his throat. Turning pale, he asked:

"Why did they give you those Christian names?"

The vagabond shrugged his shoulders.

"You ought to be able to guess. When my mother left you, she wanted to make your rival believe that he was my father. He did believe it, until I was fifteen or thereabouts. At that age I began to have a suspicious likeness to you. So the dirty dog denied paternity. Still, there I was, with his two Christian names. If I had only had the luck not to resemble any one in particular, or if I had merely been the son of some third scallywag, who had kept out of the way, I should now be calling myself the Vicomte Philippe-Auguste de Pravallon, whose relationship had been somewhat tardily recognized by his father, the Count of the same name. I have baptized myself since then, however, and call myself 'No-luck-at-all'."

"How did you find out all these facts?"

"Because they conducted their controversies in my presence. Plain-speaking it was, I can tell you. Ah! that's the sort of thing that teaches you what life is."

Much as the Abbé had suffered during the preceding half-hour, the feelings that now swept over him had fresh poignancy, an enhanced power to torture him. He felt as if he were choking, with an oppression that would become stronger and stronger until it killed him. It arose not so much from the bare facts to which he was listening, as from the way in which they were recounted; from some-

thing in the face of the dissolute wretch who narrated them, which endued them with disgusting significance. Between him and this creature, who was his son, he began to realise that there lay a trench brimming with moral filth, with a foulness, that is mortal poison to a healthy mind. And that was his son! As yet he could hardly believe it. He must have all the proofs, every possible proof. He must learn all, he must listen, understand and endure each pang. Again he thought of the olive-trees that surrounded his little house. And again the prayer came to his lips:

"Oh God in Heaven, succour me."

Philippe-Auguste had finished his plate of soup.

"Is that all there is to eat?" he asked.

The kitchen was built on to the house, and Marguerite could not hear the Abbé when he called. He used to summon her with a few strokes upon a Chinese gong which hung just behind his chair. He took the leather-covered gong-stick and struck the round disc of metal two or three times. The sound, feeble at first, grew louder and harsher till the tones rang out sharp, shrill, ear-piercing, with the plaintive clang of bronze.

Marguerite answered the summons. Her face was rigid with disapproval. She cast furtive glances at the *maoufatan,* as though with the instinct of a faithful hound, she had some presentiment of the tragedy that hung over her master. She brought in the dish with the grilled bass, which diffused a fragrant odour of melted butter.

The Abbé divided the fish lengthways with a spoon and offered the back fillet to the son of his youth.

"I have just caught this fish myself," he declared, with a touch of pride, which emerged through his distress.

Marguerite had remained in the room.

"Fetch the wine. The best wine. The white wine of Cap Corse," the Abbé ordered.

She made a gesture, which almost threatened disobedience and he had to repeat his order in a severe tone.

"Come now. Fetch the wine. Two bottles."

When he had the rare pleasure of offering wine to a guest, he always indulged in a bottle himself. Radiant with expectation, Philippe-Auguste murmured:

"First-rate! It's a long time since I had a meal like this."

Marguerite came back in a couple of minutes, but to the Abbé, who was now consumed, as by the flames of hell, by a necessity to know the whole truth, the time of her absence seemed as long as two eternities.

After the bottles were uncorked, Marguerite lingered on in the room with her eyes fixed upon the stranger.

"You may go," said the Abbé.

She pretended not to hear him.

"I asked you to leave us," the Abbé said peremptorily, and at that she removed herself.

Philippe-August devoured the fish with voracious rapidity. His father, watching him, observed with increasing amazement and chagrin how deeply the face, which was so like his own, was branded with the stigmata of degradation. He himself could not eat the morsels of fish, which he put into his mouth and continued to masticate. His throat felt constricted; he could not swallow. A thousand questions thronged into his mind, and he kept searching for the one, which would elicit the answer he was most eager to provoke. Finally, in a low tone, he asked:

"Of what did she die?"

"Lungs."

"Was she ill for long?"

"About eighteen months."

"How did she contract the ailment?"

"They couldn't say."

A silence fell on them and the Abbé continued to reflect. His ignorance weighed on his mind. There was so much that he was now eager to hear. He knew nothing of what had happened to her since the day, when, after he had been within an ace of killing her, he had

sent her away. It was true that for many years he had lost all desire to learn. He had resolutely cast her and his days of happiness into the gulf of oblivion. But, now, at the news of her death, he was seized with a desire to know all, a desire, fraught with the jealousy, almost with the ardour, of a lover.

"She was not alone at that time?"

"No. She still lived with him."

"With him? With Pravallon?" the Abbé asked, with a start.

"Why, yes."

So the same woman, who had betrayed and deceived him, had lived for over thirty years with his rival. The next question came involuntarily to his trembling lips.

"Were they happy together?"

Philippe-Auguste replied, with a sneering laugh:

"Well, yes. They had their ups and downs. They would have got on all right if I hadn't been there. I was always the fly in the ointment."

"Why so?"

"I've told you that already. Till I was about fifteen he thought I was his son. But the old boy was no fool. He noticed the resemblance all by himself, without help from anybody, and then there was a to-do. I used to listen at the keyhole. He accused my mother of having let him down, and she said, 'Well, was it my fault? You knew very well that I was the other man's mistress at the time you took me on.' The other man was you."

"Ah! then they used to speak of me sometimes?"

"Yes, but they never mentioned your name in my presence except at the end, right at the end, during the last few days, when my mother felt she was going. And even then they didn't trust each other."

"And you . . . you learned pretty early that your mother's position was irregular?"

"What do you think? I'm no greenhorn. For that matter, I never was one. As soon as a man begins to

know a bit of the world, he gets the hang of a situation like that."

Philippe-Auguste was helping himself freely to the wine. His eyes were lit up and he was yielding to the rapid intoxication that overtakes a half-starving man. The Abbé noticed this, but did nothing to check him. He reflected that drunkenness sapped a man's self-control and induced him to talk the more freely. He accordingly refilled the young man's glass.

Marguerite brought in the chicken and rice, and placed it on the table. Then she fixed her gaze anew upon her master's disreputable guest.

" He's drunk, *Monsieur le curé*. Only look at him," she said indignantly.

" Kindly leave us alone," replied the Abbé. " And go away."

She slammed the door as she went out.

The Abbé turned to his guest.

" Tell me what your mother used to say about me."

" Oh, just the sort of thing they always say when they leave a man in the lurch. She said you weren't easy to get on with, and you got on her nerves, and you would have made her life very difficult with your queer notions."

" Did she often say that? "

" Yes. Sometimes she wrapped it up so that I shouldn't understand it, but I could always guess."

" How did the two of them treat you? "

" Very well, at first. Very badly, afterwards. As soon as my mother saw that I was queering her pitch, she bundled me out."

" How did she manage that? "

" How? Oh, quite easily. I went a bit on the loose when I was sixteen or so, and the dirty sweeps stuck me into a reformatory, to get rid of me."

He put his elbows on the table, rested his cheeks on his hands, and, his brain being turned with the wine, he suddenly yielded to that irresistible impulse, which drives

a drunk man to indulge in fantastic boasts. He smiled. And in his smile there was an attractiveness, a feminine grace, and at the same time, an element of perversity, which the Abbé recognised. Not only did he recognise it, but he again felt the charm of it, hateful yet insidious, which had formerly conquered and destroyed him. At that moment it was the likeness to his mother that was noticeable. The resemblance did not lie in the actual features, but in that expression, so captivating, so insincere, in the seductiveness of that treacherous smile, which parted his lips, merely that they might give vent to all the vileness that lay behind them. Philippe-Auguste pursued his narrative.

"Ah! It was a queer life I led after I left the reformatory! Any great novelist would pay me well to tell him all about it. I assure you, the elder Dumas with his Monte Cristo never imagined anything weirder than the things that happened to me."

He fell into a silence. His face wore the portentous gravity of the meditative drunkard. Then he began to speak again, with deliberation.

"If you want a boy to turn out well, you should never send him to a reformatory, whatever he has done. He learns things there. I picked up a notion or two myself, but they didn't work. I was racketing about one evening with three pals. We were all a bit sprung. It was about nine o'clock on the main road, near the Folac ferry. I came across a carriage with all the occupants sound asleep. They consisted of the driver and his family, people from Martinon who had been dining in town. I took the horse by the reins, led him up on to the ferryman's barge, and then I pushed the barge off into deep water. The driver of the carriage, disturbed by the noise I made, woke up, and suspecting nothing, whipped up his horse. Off goes the horse, and down goes the carriage into the river. Every soul was drowned. My pals gave me away. They were willing enough to laugh while they saw me performing my little joke. Of course, it never occurred to any of

us that the thing would turn out so badly. Just for the fun of it, we thought we would give those people a ducking. On my honour I didn't deserve to be punished for it. However, I did worse things later on, and took my revenge that way. But they are hardly worth the trouble of telling you. I'll just tell you one of my exploits, the latest, because I'm sure you'll be delighted with it. I avenged you, my dear papa!"

The Abbé could not eat another morsel. He merely gazed at his son with horrified eyes.

Philippe-Auguste was about to resume his narrative, when his father interrupted him, and asked him to wait one moment. He turned and struck the strident Chinese gong, and Marguerite entered immediately. He issued his orders to her in so harsh a tone that she cowered before him in terrified obedience.

"Bring in the lamp and the rest of the food. After that, don't come in again, unless I strike the gong."

She went out, and presently returned carrying a white porcelain lamp with a green shade. Then she brought in a large piece of cheese and some fruit, set them on the table and retired.

"Now," said the Abbé in resolute tones, "I am ready. Go on."

Philippe-Auguste calmly helped himself to the dessert and to another glass of wine. The second bottle was nearly finished, although the Abbé had hardly touched it. The young man's speech was thick and heavy with the food and wine he had consumed. He stammered as he told his story.

"Well, this was my latest . . . pretty hot stuff . . . I had come back home, and I stayed on in the house because those two were afraid of me . . . yes . . . afraid . . . Ah, people had better not play the fool with me . . . I don't care what I do when I get my back up . . . You know . . . they were living together and yet not together. He had two houses, a senator's house and another for his mistress. But he spent most of his time with my mother

because he was no longer able to do without her. Oh, my mother was a cunning one, and clever. She was the one to keep a hold on a man. She had that fellow in her power, body and soul, and she held on to him to the last day of her life. What fools men are! Well, I was at home and I got the whiphand over them by making them afraid of me. I tell you, I'm a nailer at wriggling out of trouble when it has got to be done, and if it comes to dodges and tricks, or force either, I'm afraid of nobody. My mother fell ill and he put her into a fine house near Meulon. It stood in the middle of a park as big as a forest. That lasted about eighteen months, as I told you. Then we saw that the end was near. Pravallon used to come from Paris every day to see her, and his grief was genuine. It really was. One morning they had been talking for about an hour and I was wondering what they could be jabbering about for such a long time, when they called me in, and my mother said to me:

'I am going to die very soon and there is a secret I wish to tell you, although the Count thinks I oughtn't to.' She always called him 'the Count' when she referred to him. 'Your father is still alive, and I am going to tell you his name.'

I had asked her times out of number to tell me this . . . times out of number . . . the name of my father . . . times out of number . . . and she had always refused. I believe one day I boxed her ears to make her speak, but even that was no good. In order to get rid of me, she declared that you had died a pauper, that you were a nobody, a casual error of her young days, a girlish blunder. She reeled it all off so plausibly, that I believed every word about your death.

'Your father's name,' she said.

Pravallon was sitting there in an armchair and he called out just like this, three times:

'You are wrong, you are wrong, you are wrong, Rosette.'

My mother sat up in bed. I can see her still, with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes. In spite of everything she was very fond of me, and she said:

'Then you must do something for him, Philippe.'

She used to call him Philippe and me Auguste.

He began to shout like a madman.

'For that blackguard? For that worthless wretch, for that gaol-bird, for that . . .'

He found as many names for me as if he had spent all his life thinking them out.

I was getting a bit annoyed, but my mother made me keep quiet. She said to him:

'You want him to die of hunger. You know that I have nothing to give him.'

Not in the least perturbed, he replied:

'Rosette, for thirty years I have given you thirty-five thousand francs a year. That makes more than a million francs. Thanks to me you have lived the life of a woman of wealth, you have been cherished, and I venture to maintain, happy. I owe nothing to this wretch who has spoiled our last years together, and from me he shall have not a farthing. It is useless your insisting. Tell him his father's name if you wish. I disapprove, but I wash my hands of him.'

Then my mother turned to me. I was just thinking to myself: 'That's all right. Now I shall discover my real father. If he has money, I'm saved.'

My mother continued:

'Your father, Baron de Vilbois, passes now under the name and title of the Abbé Vilbois, parish priest of Garandou, near Toulon. He was my lover and I left him and came to the Count.'

Then she told me the whole story. She omitted, however, to let me know that she had fooled you over her child's paternity. Women are women, you know. They can't ever tell the whole truth."

He sniggered cynically, hardly aware of the vileness of his own utterances. He drank some more wine, and then,

with the same expression of amusement on his face, went on with his story.

"My mother died two days . . . two days later. He and I both followed her coffin to the cemetery. Funny, wasn't it? He and I. And the three servants. That was all. He wept like a cow. We were standing side by side. Anyone would have taken us for father and son. Then we went back to the house. We two, alone. I was thinking to myself that I would have to clear out. I had just fifty francs. Not another farthing. What possible way was there for me to be revenged on him? He touched me on the arm and said:

'I want to speak to you.'

I followed him into his office-room. He seated himself at his table and then, spluttering through his tears, he told me that he didn't mean to be as hard on me as he had said to my mother. He begged me not to make myself a nuisance to you. But that—that lies between you and me. He offered me a banknote of a thousand . . . a thousand francs. What use was a thousand franc note to a man like me? I noticed that he had a whole heap of them in his drawer. When I caught sight of those banknotes, I felt like sticking a knife into him. I stretched out my hand to take the note he was offering me, but instead of accepting his alms, I jumped on the top of him, I threw him down on the floor, and squeezed his throat till his eyes nearly popped out of his head. I didn't loosen my grip until he was nearly done. Then I gagged him, tied him up firmly, stripped his clothes off him, and then turned him over on his front. Ha! ha! ha! I avenged you properly."

Philippe-Auguste choked with mirth till he coughed. His upper lip was curled with cruel gaiety, and again the Abbé Vilbois recognised the smile he had known so well in bygone years, the smile of the woman who had lured him to destruction.

"And after that?"

"After that. Ha ha ha! There was a great fire in the

chimney-place. It was December, very cold; that's what killed my mother. It was a big coal fire. I took the poker and made it red-hot, and then I branded him all over the back with crosses, eight or ten of them, I don't remember how many, and then I turned him over again and branded his belly. Wasn't that a good joke, papa? That's how they used to brand the convicts in old times. He squirmed like an eel, but he couldn't say a word. I had him well gagged. Then I took the banknotes, twelve of them; and that made thirteen counting my own; an unlucky number for me. Then I cleared out, after telling the servants they were not to disturb their master until dinner-time, because he was asleep. Considering that he was a senator, I was convinced that he would keep his mouth shut for fear of the scandal. But I made a mistake there. I was arrested four days later in a Paris restaurant, and I got three years' imprisonment. That is the reason why I couldn't come sooner to look you up."

He took another drink. Stuttering so badly that he could hardly bring out his words, he said:

"Now then . . . papa . . . my reverend papa . . . what a joke to have a parish priest for a papa! Ha, ha! You'll have to be nice to me, very nice to little me, because I'm rather unusual . . . and I served him out . . . I did . . . quite handsomely . . . that old boy . . ."

The Abbé Vilbois now felt himself roused by this loathsome creature to the same fury that had maddened him when confronted by the woman who had betrayed him. In the name of God, he had given absolution for many sins, for shocking secrets, which had been whispered to him in the mystery of the confessional. But now in his own person, he had neither pity, nor pardon. He no longer invoked that God of mercy, helpfulness and compassion, for he realised that the protection of neither God nor man will avail to save, on this earth below, those who are the victims of such dread mischances. All the ardour of his passionate heart, all the rage of his fiery temper, which he had restrained in virtue of his holy office, burst

forth into irresistible revolt against this wretch, who was his son; against the resemblance he bore not only to his father, but to his mother, to that unworthy mother, who had conceived him after her own nature; against the fatality which riveted this scoundrel to his parent, as the cannon-ball is riveted to the ankle of the galley-slave. Roused by this shock from the dreamy piety and tranquility of twenty-five years, he faced the situation and foresaw the future with sudden lucidity. He realised that he must use the strong hand with this ruffian, and terrify him at the first onset. His jaws were clenched in fury. Forgetting that the man was drunk, he said:

"Now that you have told me all, you can listen to me. You will leave this village to-morrow morning. You will go to a place, which I shall indicate to you, and you will not leave that place without my orders. I shall make you an allowance which will be enough for you to live on. It will be small. I am a poor man myself now. If you disobey my orders on any single occasion, I shall stop my remittances and you will have to deal with me personally."

Stupefied with drink as he was, Philippe-Auguste understood the threat. The criminal in him suddenly rose to the surface. Venomously, between hiccoughs, he spat out these words:

"Ah, papa . . . mustn't do that . . . papa is a parish priest . . . I've got you . . . under my thumb . . . you'll sing small, like the rest of them."

The Abbé started. He felt in his old, but still herculean muscles, an invincible impulse to seize this monster, to bend him like a twig, and show him that he must give way. He seized the table, and shook it, and hurled his words right into the vagabond's face:—

"Have a care. I warn you. Have a care. I'm afraid of no man . . ."

The drunken man lost his balance and rocked from side to side in his chair. Realising that he was on the point of falling and that he was in the Abbé's power, he stretched

forth his hand towards a knife which lay on the table-cloth. The gleam of murder in his eyes was unmistakable. The Abbé Vilbois saw the movement and pushed the table with such force that his son fell over backwards and lay at full length on the floor. The lamp upset, and the room was in darkness. There was a jingling of wine-glasses, and for a few seconds the clear bell-like notes vibrated through the room. Then came a rustling sound as of some soft body crawling along the paved floor. And after that, silence.

With the breaking of the lamp, darkness had descended upon them, so sudden and unexpected and profound, that both men were aghast as at some terrifying accident. The drunkard, cowering against the wall, never stirred. The Abbé remained seated in his chair. The deep night, in which he was plunged, had the effect of subduing his anger. The veil of blackness that had fallen upon him immobilised his raging impulses. And gradually other thoughts took possession of him, thoughts as dark and gloomy as the enveloping obscurity.

Silence. Silence as impenetrable as the silence of a walled-in tomb. A silence of death. No sound came from without; not so much as the rolling of a distant carriage-wheel, or the barking of a dog; not even the whispering passage of the wind through the olive branches or along the walls.

This silence lasted for a long, long time, perhaps an hour. Then suddenly the gong rang out. Once only it sounded, smitten by a hard, sharp, vigorous stroke. On the top of that came the crash of a fall, and of the upsetting of a chair.

Marguerite, who had been all the time on the alert, came running in from the kitchen, but when she opened the dining-room door she started back in terror from the impenetrable darkness. A trembling seized her, her heart beat fast, and in fear-stricken tones she gasped:

"Master, where are you? Speak."

There was no reply. Nothing stirred in the room.

"Good Heavens," she thought. "What have they been doing? What has happened?"

She had not the courage either to advance into the room or to go back to the kitchen for a light. Her limbs shook under her; she would have given the world to be able to escape, to run away, to scream. But all she could do was to keep on saying:

"Master, where are you? Speak. It is Marguerite."

Then, despite her fears, a sudden and instinctive desire to come to the help of her master surged up within her. She was inspired with that panic-stricken courage which sometimes comes to women in such moments, and renders them capable of heroic actions. Running to her kitchen, she came back with a lamp. She stopped on the threshold of the dining-room and looked in. The first thing she saw was the stranger lying at full length on the floor, close to the wall. He was sleeping, or feigning sleep. Next she noticed the overturned lamp. And last of all, under the table, she saw the feet and legs of the Abbé, in their black shoes and stockings. He had seemingly struck the gong with his head and had then collapsed on to his back on the floor.

She was trembling in every limb.

"Good God," she said again and again, "Good God! What has happened?"

Timidly and slowly she went forward into the room. Her feet slipped on something slimy and she nearly came down. She stooped and examined the red flagstones. All about her feet she saw a crimson fluid, which trickled in the direction of the door. It was blood.

She hurled away the lamp so that she might see no more. Beside herself with horror, she fled from the house, out into the open country and made for the village. In her blind flight she kept running into the trunks of the olive trees. She screamed as she ran, and her eyes were fixed on the distant lights of the village. Her shrieks pierced the darkness like the sinister cry of the screech-owl, and she went on shouting:

" Le maoufatan, le maoufatan, le maoufatan."

When she reached the outlying houses of the hamlet, the frightened villagers ran out and gathered round her, but she had completely lost her head and could not answer their questions. She was still struggling with overwhelming terror. But they gathered that some disaster had occurred in the Abbé's house among the olives, and the men snatched up weapons and ran to the help of their priest.

The Abbé's pink-washed cottage in the olive orchard was invisible in the dark and silent night. When the solitary lamp, which lighted its one window, had been extinguished, like the closing of an eye, the house was plunged in shadow, lost in the darkness, undiscoverable by anyone save a native of the country. Presently the lanterns, which were carried close to the ground, could be seen approaching the house, across the plantation of olives. The long yellow streaks of light shot over the parched grass. Under the distortion of these rays, the gnarled trunks of the olives took on the semblance of monsters, of serpents of the Inferno, interlaced and writhing. In the farthest flashes of light there suddenly rose out of the darkness a phantom shape, which presently revealed itself as the low right-angled wall of the pink-washed house, its colour showing up in the glow of the lanterns. These were carried by peasants, who formed an escort to the two gendarmes, armed with revolvers, to the rural policeman and the mayor. Marguerite was with them, but had to be supported on either side, being on the verge of collapse. There was a momentary recoil before the dark and terrifying cavern beyond the doorway. But the sergeant seized a lantern and entered the house, while the others followed him.

Marguerite's story was true. The blood, now coagulated, spread like a carpet on the floor. It had reached as far as Philippe-Auguste; his legs and one of his hands were crimson with it.

Father and son slept.

The Abbé's throat was cut. Philippe-Auguste was plunged in drunken sleep, but his father's sleep was the slumber of eternity. The two gendarmes threw themselves upon the son and clasped the handcuffs round his wrists before he had time to wake up. When he came to himself, he rubbed his eyes. He was still in the stupor of intoxication. At the sight of the Abbé's corpse, he seemed frightened and bewildered.

"Why did he not make his escape?" the mayor asked.

"He was too drunk," the sergeant replied.

Everyone present agreed with him. It would never have occurred to any of them that the Abbé Vilbois had, perhaps, with his own hand, committed the act of self-destruction.

[illegible]
21/8/57

III. LOST AT SEA

I

EVERYONE at Fécamp knew the history of mother Patin. One thing was certain : she had not been happy with her husband, who in his lifetime had thrashed her as wheat is thrashed in a barn.

Many years before, though she was a penniless lass, he had taken her to wife, because she was pretty and attractive. Patin, who at that time was master of a fishing boat, was a good sailor, but a brute. He used to go to old Auban's liquor shop, where his usual allowance was four or five small glasses of spirits. However, when he had had a good catch, he would take eight or ten, or even more, if, as he put it, he was feeling cheerful. The customers were served by Auban's daughter, a pleasant-looking dark-eyed girl, who attracted custom to the house by her appearance only, for there had never been any gossip at her expense.

When Patin came to the liquor shop he at first contented himself with looking at the girl. He might make a few quiet and respectful remarks to her, but he never went beyond the limits of propriety. His first glass of brandy, however, added to her attractiveness; with the second glass he was winking at her; with the third he was saying, " If you only would, Mademoiselle Désirée . . .", without finishing the phrase. With the fourth glass he was snatching at her skirt and trying to kiss her; and when he got as far as his tenth, old Auban sent his daughter away and served the remaining drinks himself.

Auban was an old hand at the game of keeping licensed premises, and was up to all the tricks of the trade. He would keep his daughter moving about among the tables, to provoke the consumption of liquor, and Désirée, who had learnt a thing or two from the old man, had a merry smile and a roguish eye, and as she exchanged pleasantries with the topers, did not forget to exercise the attraction of her sex.

Patin was so constant a frequenter of Auban's shop that Désirée's face became very familiar to him. Even when he was in his boat, casting his nets in the open sea, whether the weather was windy or calm, the night dark or moonlit, his mind would dwell on her. He thought of her, when he was seated in the stern of his boat with his hand on the tiller, while his four shipmates were dozing with their faces on their arms. And when he saw her in those reveries, she was always smiling at him, raising her shoulder to pour out for him a glass of the amber-coloured brandy, and then, as she left him, saying:

"There! Is that what you want?"

So constantly did he have her in his mind and eye, so fiercely did he desire to make her his wife, that at last he could bear it no longer and demanded her hand in marriage.

He was well-off, owning his boat and nets, as well as a house at the foot of the slope on the Retenue, whereas old Auban had nothing. His offer was therefore accepted with alacrity, and the wedding took place with the least possible delay, both parties being anxious for the affair to be consummated, though for different reasons.

However, hardly three days had elapsed since the marriage ceremony, when Patin began to wonder how on earth he had come to believe that Désirée was different from any other woman. To be sure, he reflected, he must have been crazy to get himself tied up with a penniless wench who had lured him on with her brandy. Brandy indeed! He would wager that she had doctored the stuff with some drug or other for his benefit. For whole

tides, he never ceased swearing. He bit through the stem of his pipe; he bullied his crew; he vented every curse he knew against things in general, and spat out the remains of his rage upon the fish and lobsters, as he drew them one by one out of the net. He could not throw them into the hampers without obscene oaths.

When he reached home, his wife, Auban's daughter, was always there within reach of word or blow, and he quickly learnt to treat her as the most contemptible of created things. Désirée was accustomed to her father's barbarity, and accepted her husband's insults with a resignation which exasperated him to fury. At last came a night when he gave her a beating, and after that her existence with him was terrible indeed.

For the next ten years, a favourite theme of conversation on the Retenue was the thrashings Patin gave his wife, and the foul language he hurled at her head on every possible occasion.

He really had a special gift of profanity; he was never at a loss for oaths and he roared them with a resounding zest, which no other man in Fécamp could rival. The moment his boat came into view at the entrance of the port, people were on the alert for the first broadside, which he would launch from the deck to the jetty, as soon as he caught sight of his wife's white bonnet. He would be standing in the stern of his boat, with his hand on the tiller, and his eyes watching the bow and the sail. It might be a day when the sea was running high, and all his attention taken up by the difficulty of piloting his boat through the narrow passage; a ground swell might be sending its mountainous rollers through the neck of the harbour; it was all one to him. He scanned the group of women who were awaiting their husbands on the spray-lashed jetty, and tried to pick out his wife, old Auban's daughter, the beggarly trash. The moment he saw her, he would, in spite of the uproar of wind and waves, launch at her a torrent of abuse, in such a terrifying bellow, that the bystanders could not help laughing,

much as they pitied the victim. When the boat came alongside the quay he had a way of discharging his ballast of good manners, to use an expression of his own, while he was unloading the catch of fish, which brought all the scamps and unemployed of the port hanging about his mooring-ropes. Sometimes the insults were brief and terrible, like cannon-fire; sometimes they were like a rolling peal of thunder, which lasted for five minutes. It was such a hurricane of grossness that he seemed to have all the storms of God stored in his lungs. When he stepped ashore and came face to face with his spouse in the midst of a throng of fish-wives and inquisitive bystanders, he raked out from the bottom of the hold a whole new cargo of insults and wounding speeches, which he inflicted on her while they were going homewards, she leading, he following, he cursing, she weeping. As soon as he was alone with her, he cuffed her on the slightest pretext. Any excuse was good enough to justify a blow, and once he had started, he could not stop. And all the time he spat into her face the reason of his hatred. At every box on the ear, at every thump with his fist, he shouted:

"Ah, you beggar, you pauper, you empty-belly, I made a proper fool of myself when I rinsed my teeth with your swindling father's rot-gut liquor."

The poor woman lived in an atmosphere of never-ceasing terror, continually panic-stricken, soul and body, in bewildered expectation of new outrages and thrashings.

This state of affairs endured for ten years. She became so cowed that she could not talk to anyone without turning pale. Her thoughts were occupied exclusively with the blows that menaced her. She became as thin and yellow and dry as a smoked fish.

II

ONE night when her husband was at sea, she was suddenly awakened by the fierce growling of the wind at its first onset, like a dog slipped from the leash. She sat up in bed, in terror; then the sound died away and she lay down again. Almost immediately there came from the fireplace a roar, which shook the whole house. Presently the whole sky seemed to be filled with it, as if a herd of wild beasts were careering across the void, panting and bellowing. She sprang out of bed and ran down to the harbour. Other women were hurrying thither from all sides, bringing lanterns, and men came running up. All of them looked at the sea and saw the foam on the summits of the waves, flashing white through the darkness.

The storm lasted for fifteen hours. Eleven fishermen never came home. Patin was one of them. Fragments of Patin's boat, the Jeune-Amélie, were washed up near Dieppe and the bodies of his crew somewhere near Saint-Valéry. But Patin's body was never found. The hulk of the Jeune-Amélie seemed to have been cut in two. Possibly there had been a collision. In that case the other boat might have picked him up, alone of all the crew, and sailed away with him.

Gradually she accustomed herself to the idea that she was a widow. But for all that she was still startled whenever a neighbour, or a beggar, or a travelling peddler suddenly entered her house.

One afternoon about four years after the disappearance of her husband, she was walking along the *rue aux Juifs*, and she stopped before the house of an old sea-captain, recently deceased, whose effects were being auctioned. Just as she was passing, a green parrot with a blue head was put up for sale. The bird regarded the bystanders with an air of mingled apprehension and disgust.

"Three francs!" cried the auctioneer. "A bird that speaks like a lawyer. Three francs."

A friend of Désirée's jogged her elbow.

"You ought to buy that," she said. "You have the money. It would be company for you. It's worth more than thirty francs, that bird is. You could always sell it again at twenty or twenty-five."

"Four francs, ladies, four francs," continued the auctioneer. "He sings vespers and preaches like a parish priest. He is a phenomenon, a miracle."

Désirée raised the bidding to four francs fifty centimes, and at that price the bird, along with a small cage, was knocked down to her. When she opened the wire door of the cage to give the bird a drink, it jabbed her finger with its hooked beak, which cut through the skin and drew blood.

"Ah, he's a bad one," she said.

However, she gave him some hemp-seed and maize, and then left him alone to preen his feathers, which he did, while sardonically taking stock of his new house and mistress.

Daylight was just breaking on the following morning when Madame Patin heard, as clearly as possible, a human voice, a strong, sonorous, rolling voice. It was the voice of Patin.

"Will you get up, you slut?"

Now, her late husband had been in the habit, the moment he opened his eyes in the morning, of shouting these very words in her ear, and well she knew them. On hearing them again her terror was such that she hid her head under the blankets. Huddled up, trembling all over, her back braced to receive the blows, which she was momentarily expecting, she hid her face in the pillow.

"God in heaven!" she murmured. "He has come back. God in heaven, here he is. Oh my God!"

Several moments elapsed, but no further sound broke the silence of the room. Shuddering, she put her head out of the bed. She was convinced that he was there, watching her and ready to strike. But she saw nothing;

nothing but a ray of sunshine coming through the window pane.

" He must be hiding," she thought.

She waited for a long time and gaining a little confidence, she reflected :

" He hasn't shown himself, so I must have been dreaming."

She was just closing her eyes again, when suddenly the furious voice of Patin broke out anew quite close to her, like a clap of thunder.

" Are you going to get up, you b——? "

She bounded out of bed, prompted by the passive obedience of a woman, who has been beaten unmercifully; who still, after four years, remembers, and for the rest of her life will always remember, and who will never fail to do the bidding of that terrible voice.

" Here I am, Patin," she replied. " What do you want? "

There was no reply.

Distraught, she gazed around. Then she searched everywhere; in the wardrobes, up the chimney, under the bed. But she found nobody.

In anguish and bewilderment, convinced that Patin's disembodied soul was there by her side, and had come back in order to torment her, she sank into a chair. Then suddenly she remembered the hayloft, which could be reached by means of an outside ladder. To be sure, Patin must have hidden himself in the loft, so as to come upon her by surprise. No doubt he had been kept prisoner by savages on some distant shore and had not been able to escape sooner. But now he had come back, wickeder than ever, as she could tell from the tone of his voice.

She looked up at the ceiling and asked :

" Are you up there, Patin? "

But there was no reply.

Then she went outside. Her heart was palpitating in an agony of dread. But she climbed the ladder, opened

the granary window, looked in, and saw nothing. She entered the loft, searched it, and found no sign of him. She sat down on a truss of straw and began to weep. But in the midst of her sobs, she was pierced through and through by poignant and supernatural terror. From the room below she heard Patin making remarks.

He seemed in less of a temper, and less excited.

"Dirty weather," he observed. "High wind. Dirty weather. I haven't had my breakfast yet. Curse it."

She called aloud through the ceiling.

"I am here, Patin. I'm coming to make your soup. Don't get angry. I'm coming."

She ran down the ladder and into the house. There was nobody there. She felt the weakness of death come over her. She was on the point of rushing out of doors to ask help of the neighbours, when the voice cried out quite close to her ear.

"I haven't had my breakfast yet. Curse it."

The parrot, in its cage, had its round, sly, wicked eye fixed on her.

Bewildered she gazed on the bird.

"Ah, it was you!" she murmured.

The parrot spoke again. He moved his head up and down and said:

"Wait, wait, wait. I'll teach you to be lazy."

What were the emotions that now seized upon her? She felt, she believed, that it was really the dead man who had come back. He had concealed himself in the plumage of this bird. Soon he would begin again to torture her as of old; he would swear at her the whole day long, he would bite her, and shout insults at her, so that all the neighbours would gather round and laugh at her.

She rushed to the cage, opened it, and grasped the bird. In self-defence the parrot tore her skin with beak and claws. But Madame Patin held on to it with all the strength of both hands. She threw herself down and rolled on the floor with the bird underneath. With the

frenzy of one possessed, she mangled it, until it was mere pulp, a small feathery green mass, which moved no more, spoke no more, but hung limply from her hands. Then she wrapped the dead bird in a duster as in a shroud, and, still in her chemise and with bare feet, crossed the quay on which the waves were beating. Shaking out the duster, she dropped into the sea this small, dead thing, which looked like a handful of grass. Then she returned to her house and fell on her knees before the empty cage, and, beside herself with agitation over what she had done, sobbing as though she had committed some horrible crime, she implored God to pardon her.

[illegible]

21/2/57

IV. THE HOSTELRY

At the foot of the glaciers, in those naked and rock-bound *couloirs* which indent the snow-clad ranges of the High Alps, you will find every here and there a guest-house. These little hostelries are constructed of timber and are all built very much to the same pattern. The Schwarenbach Inn was one of them.

The Schwarenbach served as a refuge to travellers attempting the passage of the Gemmi. For the six summer months it remained open, with Jean Hauser's family in residence; but as soon as the early snows began to accumulate, filling the valley and rendering the descent to Loeche impracticable, Jean Hauser with his three sons and his wife and daughter quitted the house, leaving it in charge of the old guide Gaspard Hari and his companion, together with Sam, the big mountain-bred dog. The two men, with the dog, lived in their prison of snow until the spring arrived. They had nothing to look at, except the vast white slopes of the Balmhorn. Pale glistening mountain peaks rose all round them. They were shut in, blockaded, by the snow; it lay on them like a shroud, growing ever deeper and deeper until the little house was enveloped, closed in, obliterated. The snow piled itself upon the roof, blinded the windows and walled up the door.

On the day, on which the Hauser family took their departure for Loeche, the winter was close at hand, and the descent was becoming dangerous. The three sons set off on foot leading three mules laden with household belongings. Behind them followed the mother, Jeanne Hauser, and her daughter Louise, both riding the same mule. Next and last came the father and the two care-

takers. The latter were to accompany the family as far as the beginning of the track, that leads down the mountainside to Loeche.

The party first skirted the edge of the little lake, already frozen, in its rocky hollow in front of the inn; then they proceeded along the valley, which lay before them, a white sheet of snow, with icy peaks dominating it on every side. A flood of sunshine fell across the whiteness of this frozen wilderness, lighting it up with a cold, blinding brilliance. There was no sign of life in this sea of mountains; not a movement could be seen in the limitless solitude; not a sound disturbed the profound silence.

Gradually the younger of the guides, Ulrich Kunsi, a tall long-limbed Swiss, forged ahead of the two older men and overtook the mule, on which the two women were riding. The daughter saw him as he approached and there was sadness in the glance with which she summoned him to her side.

She was a little peasant girl with a complexion like milk. Her flaxen hair was so pale, that one would fancy it had been bleached by prolonged residence amongst the snows and glaciers.

On overtaking the mule on which Louise and her mother were riding, Ulrich Kunsi placed his hand on the crupper and slackened his pace. The mother began talking; she expounded in infinite detail her instructions for wintering. It was the first time that Ulrich had stayed behind. Old Hari, on the other hand, had already accomplished his fourteenth hibernation, under the snow that covered the Schwarenbach Inn.

Ulrich listened, but without any appearance of grasping what was said. He never took his eyes off the daughter. Every now and then he would reply: "Yes, Madame Hauser." But his thoughts seemed far away, and his face remained calm and impassive.

They reached the Daubensee, which lies at the foot of the valley. Its surface was now a vast level sheet of ice. On the right, the rocks of the Daubenhorn, dark and

precipitous, rose above the vast moraines of the Lemmern Glacier, and the Wildstrubel towered over all.

As they approached the Gemmi saddle, from which begins the descent to Loeche, they suddenly beheld, across the deep wide valley of the Rhone, the prodigious sky-line of the Valais Alps, a distant multitude of white peaks of unequal size, some pointed, some flattened, but all glistening in the rays of the sun.

There was the two-horned Mischabel, the majestic mass of the Weisshorn, the lumbering Brunegghorn, the lofty and fear-inspiring Cervin, which has killed so many men, and the Dent-Blanche, monstrous yet alluring. Below them, in an enormous hollow at the foot of terrifying precipices, they caught sight of Loeche, so far away from them that the houses seemed like a handful of sand, thrown down into the vast crevasse, which has at one end the barrier of the Gemmi, and at the other, a wide exit to the Rhone valley.

They had reached the head of a path, which winds downwards, in serpentine coils, fantastic and extraordinary, along the mountain side, until it reaches the almost invisible village at the foot. The mule stopped and the two women jumped down into the snow. By this time the two older men had overtaken the rest of the party.

" Now, friends," said old Hauser, " we must say good-bye till next year. And keep your hearts up."

" Till next year," replied Hari.

The men embraced. Madame Hauser gave her cheek to be kissed and her daughter followed her example. When it was Ulrich Kunsi's turn to kiss Louise, he whispered in her ear :

" Don't forget us up on our heights."

" No," she replied in tones so low that he guessed, rather than heard, the word.

" Well, well, good-bye," said old Hauser again. " Take care of yourselves."

He strode on past the women and led the way down-

wards. All three were lost to view at the first bend in the track. Gaspard and Ulrich turned back towards the Schwarenbach Inn. They walked slowly and in silence, side by side. They had seen the last of their friends. They were to be alone, with no other companionship, for four or five months.

Gaspard Hari began to tell Ulrich about the previous winter. His companion then had been Michael Carol; but accidents were likely to happen during the long solitude, and Michael had grown too old for the job. Still, they had had a pretty good time together. The secret of the whole thing was to make up your mind to it from the beginning. Sooner or later one invented distractions and games and things to while away the time.

With downcast eyes Ulrich Kunsi listened to his companion, but his thoughts were following the women, who were making their way to the village, down the zigzag path on the Gemmi mountain side.

They soon caught sight of the distant inn. It looked very tiny, like a black dot at the base of the stupendous mountain of snow. When they opened the door of the house, Sam, the great curly-haired dog, gambolled round them joyfully.

"Well, Ulrich, my boy," said old Gaspard, "we have no women here now. We must get dinner ready ourselves. You can set to and peel the potatoes."

They sat down on wooden stools and began to prepare the soup. The forenoon of the following day seemed long to Ulrich Kunsi. Old Hari smoked his pipe and spat into the fireplace. The younger man looked through the window at the superb mountain, which rose in front of the house. In the afternoon he went out, and pursuing the road he had taken the previous day, he followed the tracks of the mule on which the two women had ridden. He arrived at last at the saddle of the Gemmi, and lying prone on the edge of the precipice, gazed down on Loeche. The village, nestling in its rocky hollow, had not yet been obliterated by the snow. But there was snow very near it. Its

advance had been arrested by the pine forests which guarded the environs of the hamlet. Seen from a height, the low houses of the village looked like paving-stones set in a field.

Ulrich reflected that Louise Hauser was now in one of those grey cottages. Which one was it, he wondered. They were too remote to be separately distinguished. He had a yearning to go down there, while it was still possible. But the sun had disappeared behind the great peak of Wildstrubel, and Ulrich turned homewards. He found Hari smoking. On Ulrich's return Hari proposed a game of cards and the two men sat down on opposite sides of the table. They played for a long time at a simple game called brisque. Then they had supper and went to bed.

Subsequent days were like the first, clear and cold, without any fresh fall of snow. Gaspard passed his days watching the eagles and other rare birds, which adventure themselves in these frozen altitudes. For his part, Ulrich went regularly to the *col* to look down at the distant village. In the evening they played cards, dice and dominos, staking small objects to lend an interest to the game.

One morning, Hari, who had been the first to rise, called out to Ulrich. A drifting cloud of white foam, deep yet ethereal, was sinking down on them and on all around them, spreading over them slowly, silently, a cover which grew ever thicker and heavier. The snowfall lasted four days and four nights. The door and windows had to be cleared, a passage dug, and steps cut, to enable them to climb out on to the surface of powdery snow, which twelve hours of frost had made harder than the granite of the moraines.

After that, they lived as in a prison, hardly ever venturing outside their dwelling. The household tasks were divided between them and were punctually performed. Ulrich Kunsi undertook the cleaning and washing up and keeping the house neat. He also split the

firewood. Hari kept the fire going and did the cooking. These necessary and monotonous tasks were relieved by long contests at dice or cards. Being both of them of calm and placid temperament, they never quarrelled. They never went even as far as to display impatience or peevishness, or to speak sharply to each other, both having determined beforehand to make the best of their wintry sojourn on the heights. Occasionally Gaspard took his gun and went out hunting chamois, and when he had the good luck to kill one, it was high day and holiday in the Schwarenbach Inn and there was great feasting on fresh meat.

One morning Hari set forth on one of these expeditions. The thermometer outside the inn showed thirty degrees of frost. Hari started before sunrise, hoping to take the chamois by surprise on the lower slopes of the Wildstrubel.

Left to himself, Ulrich remained in bed until ten o'clock. He was by nature a good sleeper, but he would not have dared to give way to this proclivity in the presence of the old guide, who was an early riser and always full of energy. He lingered over his breakfast, which he shared with Sam, who passed his days and nights sleeping in front of the fire. After breakfast he felt his spirits oppressed, and almost daunted, by the solitude, and he longed for his daily game of cards with the unconquerable craving, that comes of ingrained habit. Later, he went out to meet his comrade, who was due to return at four o'clock.

The whole valley was now of a uniform level under its thick covering of snow. The crevasses were full to the top; the two lakes could no longer be distinguished; the rocks lay hid under a snowy quilt. Lying at the foot of the immense peaks, the valley was now one immense basin, symmetrical, frozen, and of a blinding whiteness.

It was three weeks since Ulrich had been to the edge of the precipice from which he looked down at the village. He thought he would go there again, before climbing the

slopes that led to the Wildstrubel. The snow had now reached Loeche, and the houses were lost under their white mantle.

Turning to the right, he reached the Lemmern glacier. He walked with the mountaineer's long stride, driving his iron-pointed stick down on to the snow, which was as hard as stone. With his far-sighted eyes he sought the small black dot which he expected to see moving, in the far distance, over this vast sheet of snow. On reaching the edge of the glacier he stopped, wondering whether old Hari had really come that way. Then, with increasing anxiety and quicker steps, he began to skirt the moraines.

The sun was sinking. The snow was suffused with a tinge of pink, and over its crystalline surface swept sharp gusts of a dry and icy breeze. Ulrich tried to reach his friend with a call, shrill, vibrant, prolonged. His voice took its flight into the deathless silence, in which the mountains slept. It rang far out over the deep motionless undulations of frozen foam, like the cry of a bird over the waves of the sea. Then it died away. And there was no reply.

He walked on and on. The sun had sunk behind the peaks, and the purple glow of sunset still lingered about them, but the depths of the valley were grey and shadowy, and Ulrich was suddenly afraid. He had an idea that the silence, the cold, the solitude were taking possession of him, were about to arrest his circulation and freeze his blood, stiffen his limbs and convert him into a motionless, frozen image. With all the speed he could, he ran back towards the Inn. Hari, he thought, must have taken another way and reached home already. He would find him seated by the fire, with a dead chamois at his feet. He soon came in sight of the hostelry. There was no smoke issuing from the chimney. Ulrich ran yet faster, and when he opened the door of the house, Sam leaped up to greet him. But there was no Gaspard Hari.

In consternation Kunsi turned hither and thither, as though expecting to find his comrade hiding in a corner.

Then he relighted the fire and made the soup, still hoping that he would look up and see the old man coming in. From time to time he went outside, in case there should be some sign of him. Night had fallen, that wan, livid night of the mountains, illumined only by the slender, yellow crescent of a new moon, which was sinking towards the skyline and would soon disappear behind the ridge.

Returning to the house, Ulrich sat down by the fire and while he was warming his hands and feet, his thoughts ran on possible accidents. Gaspard might have broken a leg, or fallen into a hollow, or made a false step, which had cost him a sprained ankle. He would be lying in the snow, helpless against the benumbing cold, in agony of mind, far from any other human soul, calling out for help, shouting with all the strength of his voice in the silence of the night.

How to discover where he was? So vast and craggy was the mountain, so dangerous the approaches to it, especially in the winter, that it would take ten or twenty guides searching for a week in all directions, to find a man in that immensity. None the less Ulrich made up his mind to take Sam and set forth to look for Gaspard, if he had not come back by one in the morning.

He made his preparations. He put two days' provisions into a bag, took his cramp-irons, wound round his waist a long, strong, slender rope, and inspected thoroughly his spiked stick and his ice-axes. Then he waited. The fire was burning with a clear flame; the great dog lay snoring in its warmth; the steady ticking of the clock, in its resonant wooden case, sounded like the beating of a heart. Still he waited, his ears straining to catch any distant noise. When the light breeze whispered round roof and walls, he shivered.

The clock struck the hour of midnight. Feeling chilled and nervous, he put some water on the fire to boil, so that he might have some steaming coffee before setting out. When the clock struck one, he rose, called Sam, opened the door and struck out in the direction of the

Wildstrubel. He climbed for five hours continuously. He scaled the rocks with the help of his irons, and cut steps in the ice with his axe, always advancing steadily and sometimes hauling the dog after him up some steep escarpment. It was about six o'clock when he reached one of the peaks to which Gaspard often came in search of chamois. There he waited for the day to break.

The sky above became gradually paler. Then suddenly that strange radiance, which springs no one knows whence, gleamed over the great ocean of snow-clad peaks, stretching for a hundred leagues around him. The vague light seemed to arise out of the snow itself and to diffuse itself in space. One by one, the highest and farthest pinnacles were suffused by a tender rosy hue and the red sun rose from behind the great masses of the Bernese Alps. Ulrich Kunsi set forth again. Like a hunter, he bent down, searching for tracks and saying to his dog:

"Seek, old man, seek."

He was now on his way down the mountain, investigating every chasm, and sometimes sending forth a prolonged call, which quickly died away in the dumb immensity. At times he put his ear close to the ground to listen. Once he thought he heard a voice and he ran in the direction of it, shouting as he ran, but he heard nothing more, and sat down, exhausted and despairing. About mid-day he shared some food with Sam, who was as weary as himself. And again he set out on his search. When evening came, he was still walking, having accomplished fifty kilometres among the mountains. He was too far from his house to think of returning there, and too tired to drag himself along any further. Digging a hole in the snow, he curled up in it with his dog, under cover of a blanket, which he had brought with him. Man and beast lay together, each body sharing the warmth of the other, but frozen to the marrow none the less. Ulrich's mind was haunted by visions, and his limbs were shaking with cold. He could not sleep at all. When he rose, day was on the point of breaking. His legs felt as

rigid as bars of iron; his resolution was so enfeebled, that he almost sobbed aloud in his distress, and his heart beat so violently that he nearly collapsed with emotion whenever he fancied that he heard a sound.

The thought suddenly came to him that he too might perish of cold amidst these solitudes, and the fear of such a death whipped up his energy and roused him to fresh vigour. He was now making the descent towards the Inn, and kept falling down from weariness and picking himself up again. His dog Sam, with one paw disabled, followed far behind, limping. It was four o'clock in the afternoon before they reached the Schwarenbach. Hari was not there. Ulrich lighted a fire, had something to eat, and then fell asleep, so utterly stupefied with fatigue that he could think of nothing. He slept for a long, a very long time. It seemed as if nothing could break his repose, when suddenly he heard a voice cry "Ulrich." He was shaken out of his profound torpor, and started up. Was it a dream? Was it one of those strange summonses that disturb the slumber of uneasy souls? No. He could hear it still. That quivering hail had pierced his ear, had taken possession of his body, right to the tips of his nervous fingers. Beyond all doubt, there had been a cry for help, an appeal for succour. Some one had called out "Ulrich!" Then some one must be in the vicinity of the house. There could be no question about it. He opened the door and shouted with all his strength "Gaspard, is that you?"

There was no reply. The silence was not broken by sound, or whisper, or groan. It was night, and the snow lay all around, ghastly in its whiteness.

The wind had risen. It was that icy wind which splits the rocks and leaves nothing alive on these forsaken altitudes. It blew in sharp, withering gusts, dealing death more surely than even the fiery blasts of the desert. Again Ulrich called out:

"Gaspard, Gaspard, Gaspard!"

He waited a little, but silence still reigned on the moun-

tain side, and he was forthwith stricken by a terror, which shook him to the very bones. He leaped back into the inn, closed and bolted the door, and with chattering teeth collapsed into a chair. He was now sure that the appeal for help had come from his comrade, at the moment at which he was yielding up the ghost. He was as certain of that as one is of being alive or eating bread. For two days and three nights old Gaspard Hari had been wrestling with death in some hollow in one of those deep unsullied ravines, whose whiteness is more sinister than the darkness of underground caverns. For two days and three nights he had been dying, and at this very moment, while he lay in the article of death, his thoughts had turned to his comrade, and his soul, in the instant of gaining its freedom, had flown to the inn where Ulrich lay sleeping. It had exercised that mysterious and terrible power, possessed by the souls of the dead, to haunt the living. The voiceless spirit had called aloud in the overwrought soul of the sleeper, had uttered its last farewell, or, perhaps, its reproach, its curse on the man, who had not searched diligently enough.

Ulrich felt its presence there, behind the walls of the house, behind the door, which he had just closed. The soul was prowling around. It was like a bird of night fluttering against a lighted window. Ulrich, distraught with terror, was ready to scream. He would have taken to flight, but dared not open the door. And never again, he felt, would he dare to open that door, for the spectre would be hovering, day and night, round the inn, until the corpse of the old guide had been recovered and laid in the consecrated earth of a cemetery.

When day broke, Ulrich regained a little confidence from the brilliance of the returning sun. He prepared his breakfast and made some soup for the dog, but after that, he remained seated motionless in a chair. His heart was in agony; his thoughts turned ever to the old man, who was lying out there in the snow. When night again descended upon the mountains, new terrors assailed him.

He paced to and fro in the smoke-blackened kitchen, by the dim light of a solitary candle. Up and down he strode, and always he was listening, listening, for that cry, which had terrified him the night before. Might it not ring out again through the mournful silence of the outer world? He felt forlorn, poor wretch; forlorn, as never a man had been, here in this vast whiteness of snow, all alone, seven thousand feet above the inhabited world, above the dwellings of men, above the excitements, the hubbub, the noise, the thrills of life; alone in the frozen sky. He was torn by a mad desire to make his escape in whatsoever direction, by whatsoever means; to descend to Loeche, even if he had to hurl himself over the precipice. But he did not dare so much as to open the door; he felt sure that that thing outside, the dead man, would bar his passage, and prevent him from leaving his comrade alone upon those heights.

As midnight approached his limbs grew weary, and fear and distress overcame him. He dreaded his bed, as one dreads a haunted spot, but yielding at last to drowsiness he sank into a chair.

Suddenly his ears were pierced by the same strident cry that he had heard the previous night. It was so shrill that Ulrich stretched out his hands to ward off the ghost, and losing his balance fell backwards on to the floor. Aroused by the noise, the dog began to howl in terror, and ran hither and thither in the room, trying to find out whence the danger threatened. When he came to the door, he sniffed at the edge of it, and began howling, snorting, and snarling, his hair bristling, his tail erect. Beside himself with terror, Kunsi rose and grasping a stool by one leg, shouted :

" Don't come in. Don't come in. Don't come in or I'll kill you."

Excited by his menacing tones, the dog barked furiously at the invisible enemy, whom his master was challenging. Gradually Sam calmed down, and went back to lie on the hearth, but he was still uneasy; his eyes were gleaming

and he was baring his fangs and growling. Ulrich, too, regained his wits; but feeling faint with terror, he took a bottle of brandy from the side-board and drank several glasses of it in quick succession. As his mind became duller, his courage rose, and a feverish heat coursed along his veins. On the following day he ate hardly anything, confining himself to the brandy, and for some days after, he lived in a state of brutish intoxication. The moment the thought of Gaspard Hari crossed his mind, he began drinking and he did not leave off until he collapsed to the ground in a drunken torpor, and lay there face downwards, snoring and helpless. Hardly had he recovered from the effects of the burning and maddening liquor, when the cry "Ulrich!" roused him, as though a bullet had penetrated his skull. He started to his feet, staggering to and fro, stretching out his hands to keep himself from falling, and calling to his dog to help him. Sam, too, appeared to be seized with his master's madness. He hurled himself against the door, scratching at it with his claws, gnawing it with his long white teeth, while Ulrich, with his head thrown back, his face turned upwards, swallowed brandy in great gulps, as though he were drinking cool water after a climb. Presently his thoughts, his memory, his terror, would be drowned in drunken oblivion.

In three weeks he had finished his entire stock of spirits. But the only effect of his inebriation was to lull his terror to sleep. When the means for this were no longer available, his fears returned with fresh ferocity. His fixed idea, aggravated by prolonged intoxication, gained force continually in that absolute solitude, and worked its way, like a gimlet, ever deeper into his spirit. Like a wild beast in a cage, he paced his room, every now and then putting his ear to the door to listen for the voice of Gaspard's ghost, and hurling defiance at it through the wall. And when, in utter weariness, he lay down, he would again hear the voice and leap once more to his feet. At last, one night, with the courage of a coward driven to

bay, he flung himself at the door and opened it, to see who it was who was calling him, and to compel him to silence. But the cold air struck him full in the face, and froze him to the marrow. He slammed the door to again, and shot the bolts, never noticing that his dog had dashed out into the open. Shivering, he threw some more wood on to the fire and sat down to warm himself. Suddenly he started. There was someone scratching at the wall and moaning.

"Go away," he said, terror-stricken.

The answer was a melancholy wail.

His last remaining vestiges of reason were swept away by fear.

"Go away," he cried again, and he turned hither and thither in an effort to find some corner in which he could hide himself. But the creature outside continued to wail, and passed along the front of the house, rubbing itself against the wall. Ulrich dashed to the oaken sideboard, which was full of provisions and crockery, and with superhuman strength dragged it across the room and set it against the door to act as a barricade. Then he took all the remaining furniture, mattresses, palliasses, chairs, and blockaded the window, as if in a state of siege. But the thing outside went on groaning dismally, and Ulrich himself was soon replying with groans not less lugubrious. Days and nights passed, and still these two continued to answer each other's howls.

The ghost, as it seemed to Ulrich, moved unceasingly round the house, scratching at the walls with its nails in a fierce determination to break a way through. Within the house, Ulrich crouched with his ear close to the masonry, following every movement of the thing outside, and answering all its appeals with horrifying shrieks. Then came a night, when Ulrich heard no more sounds from without. Overcome with fatigue, he dropped into a chair and fell asleep immediately. When he awoke, his mind and memory were a blank. It was as if that sleep of prostration had swept his brain clean of everything. He felt hungry and took some food . . .

The winter was over. The passage of the Gemmi became practicable; and the Hauser family set forth on its journey to the inn. At the top of the first long acclivity, the two women clambered up on to their mule. They spoke about the two men, whom they expected presently to meet again. They were surprised that neither of them had descended a few days earlier, as soon as the Loeche road was practicable, to give them the news of their long winter sojourn. When they came in sight of the inn, which was still covered with a thick mantle of snow, they saw that the door and window were closed, but old Hauser was reassured by a thin column of smoke, which was rising from the chimney. As he drew nearer, however, he saw on the outer threshold the skeleton of an animal. It was a large skeleton, lying on its side, and the flesh had been torn off the bones by eagles.

All three examined it.

"That must be Sam," Madame Hauser said.

Then she called out for Gaspard, and from the inside of the house came a shrill cry like that of an animal. Old Hauser, too, shouted Gaspard's name. A second cry came from within. The father and his two sons thereupon endeavoured to open the door, but it resisted their efforts. They took a long beam out of an empty stable, and used it as a battering-ram. They dashed it with all their strength against the door, which gave way with the shriek of splintering planks. The sideboard fell over on the floor with a great crash, which shook the house, and revealed, standing behind it, a man whose hair came down to his shoulders, and whose beard touched his chest. His eyes were bright; his clothing was in rags.

Louise alone recognised him.

"Mamma!" she gasped, "it is Ulrich."

And the mother saw that it was indeed Ulrich, although his hair had turned white.

He suffered them to come near him and touch him, but when they asked him questions, he made no reply. He

had to be taken down to Loeche, where the doctors certified that he was insane.

The fate of old Gaspard was never known.

During the following summer Louise Hauser came near to dying of a decline, which was attributed to the rigours of the mountain climate.

Humfab
4/4/57

V. A PORTRAIT

"WELL, Milial," said someone near me, accosting a friend.

I turned to look at this man of the name of Milial. I knew his reputation as a Don Juan, and had for a long time been anxious to make his acquaintance.

Milial was no longer young. His hair of lustreless grey was so thick that it looked like one of those fur caps worn in the far North, and his beard, which was of fine texture and long enough to reach his chest, had also a certain character of furriness. He was conversing with a woman, and his voice was pitched in low tones. As he talked he leaned towards her and looked at her with eyes which caressed her with gentle homage.

I knew what his life had been, or at least I knew as much as was common property. Several women had fallen madly in love with him, and dramas had occurred in which he had played the protagonist. His reputation was that of a man, whose powers of seduction were so great as to be almost irresistible. Wishing to ascertain the source of this unusual fascination, I made inquiries of some of the women who were most enthusiastic in his praise, and I observed that they always, after an effort to arrive at something definite, made the same vague reply:

"Oh, I don't know. It's just his charm."

No one would have described him as particularly good-looking. He had none of the refinements of address with which the subduers of the feminine heart are supposed to be endowed. The problem interested me, and I began to wonder wherein lay his special attraction. Was he brilliant? No one quoted his epigrams or credited him

with intelligence beyond the ordinary. Was it his eyes? Possibly. Or his voice? There are voices, which are charged with a sensuous and irresistible witchery. They have, as it were, the perfume and the savour of exquisite viands, so that one hungers to listen to them; one absorbs the sound of them as if they were something delicious to eat.

A friend of mine was passing, and I said to him:

"Do you know Monsieur Milial?"

"Yes."

"Will you introduce me to him?"

The introduction was effected, and Milial and I stood chatting together among the other guests. His conversation was agreeable and sensible, but conveyed no impression of intellectual superiority. It is true that his voice was agreeable, soft, caressing, and musical, but I had heard voices of a still more captivating quality. To listen to it was pleasing, just as it is pleasing to watch a charming stream gliding past. There was no mental strain involved in following him; there was no subtlety to excite the hearer's curiosity; one's interest was not stirred by the expectation of anything remarkable. Rather was his talk of a soothing character. It aroused neither a keen desire to challenge or contradict, nor any very ecstatic admiration. To reply to him was as easy as to listen to him. As soon as he made a remark, the answer came easily to the lips; observations flowed without effort, as though in response to some natural compulsion. One reflection occurred to me almost immediately. I had met him only a quarter of an hour ago, yet already he seemed to me like an old friend. His face, his gestures, his voice, his ideas, were as familiar to me as if I had known him for years. A few minutes of intercourse had sufficed to instal him definitely on an intimate footing with me. If he had demanded my confidence, I would have told him things about myself which ordinarily a man reveals only to his oldest comrades. There was assuredly an element of the mysterious in this. There are barriers set between

all human beings and these yield only one by one, as they are unlocked by the key of sympathy, or similar tastes, or harmony of intellectual culture, or constant association. But no such barriers seemed to stand between him and me, nor for that matter between him and other men and women, whom chance threw in his path. At the end of half an hour, when we said good-bye, we were looking forward to meeting each other again, and he gave me his address, with an invitation to lunch with him two days later.

Having forgotten the hour, I arrived too soon. He had not yet come in. A silent and well-trained man-servant showed me into a fine drawing-room, which was furnished with sober and homely good taste. At once I felt as much at ease in it, as if I had been in my own house. I have often observed the effect, which rooms have upon the character and temperament. There are rooms which inevitably make one feel stupid; others, which rouse one to animation. A room may be well-lighted, and decorated in white and gold, and yet it will make you melancholy. Another room will cheer you at once, although its furnishing may be of the soberest. Our eyes, like our souls, have their preferences and their aversions, for which there is no reason discoverable. Simply, secretly, furtively, these influences are imposed upon us. Just as the atmosphere of forest, sea or mountain affects our physical condition, so does the harmony of furniture and walls, and the general scheme of decoration act instantly upon our intellectual nature.

I took my seat upon a divan covered with silk cushions, and I at once felt as comfortably propped and supported, as if these small, silk-covered sacks of feathers had been purposely arranged to fit the contours of my body.

Then I looked round me. There was not one garish article in the room. Everything was beautiful but unpretentious; the furniture was simple but choice; the Oriental curtains looked as if they had come from the interior of a harem, and not from the Louvre.

Facing me was a young woman's portrait. It was a picture of medium size, showing the head, the upper part of the body, and the hands, which held a book. She wore no hat. Her hair was dressed in simple bandeaux. On her lips was a smile, which had a trace of sadness. Whether because her head was uncovered, or because I was impressed by the naturalness of her poise, it is a fact that I never saw a portrait which seemed so much at home, as this portrait in that room. Almost all the women's portraits I know are obviously posed. Either the subject is ostentatiously dressed, with a specially becoming coiffure; or she seems too obviously aware that she is posing, in the first place for the artist, and in the second place, for those who will look at the portrait; or she has assumed an attitude of careless ease and is wearing a dress to correspond.

Some of the ladies stand erect and majestic, flaunting their beauty with an air of haughtiness, which they would find it difficult to preserve for very long, in the common exigencies of life. Others have a self-conscious simper, although the canvas condemns their features to immobility. There is not one of them, who has not some trifle such as a flower or jewel, a fold of the gown or a curve of the lips, set there by the artist for effect. Whether they wear a hat or a wisp of lace on the head; whether the hair is unadorned, one divines in them something that is not absolutely natural. What is it? Without knowing the original it is impossible to say definitely. But the affectation is there. The subject of the portrait has the air of calling on strangers, on whom she desires to produce a good impresion. It is as if she wished to display herself to the greatest advantage. Whatever her attitude may be, whether unassuming or dignified, it is obviously studied.

But how about the portrait I was now studying? Clearly this woman was in her own house, and alone, yes, absolutely alone. Her smile was the smile of one, who dreams in solitude of something that is both sweet and

sad. It was not the smile of a woman, conscious of an admiring gaze. She was so thoroughly alone and at home, that she created a solitude, an absolute solitude, in that large room. Alone she dwelt in it, alone she sufficed to people it and animate it. Any number of men and women might enter that room; they might speak, and laugh, and even sing, but they could never break into her sanctuary. Still she would smile the smile of solitude; still would the room derive all its vitality from that face in the picture.

There was something unique in her expression. Steady, caressing, her eyes rested upon me without seeing me. All other portraits seem to know when they are being examined, and to respond with eyes that see, and think, and follow us, and never quit us, from the moment we enter the room until we leave it. But the eyes of this portrait took no notice of me or of anyone else, although they were looking straight at me. I recalled that curious line of Baudelaire:

"Thine eyes attract me as a portrait's eyes."

It is the truth that these painted eyes which had once lived, and were still perhaps living, attracted me irresistibly and filled me with me with an emotion, which was new and strange and potent. These impenetrable eyes, shining out of that sombre picture, diffused an infinite and tender charm. It was like the soft rustling of the passing breeze. It was as seductive as a dying twilight sky of lilac, rose and azure; it was as full of gentle melancholy as the night which follows such a sunset. These eyes, which were created by a few strokes of the brush, hid in their depths the mystery of something that seems to be and is not, something that can reveal itself in a woman's glance, something that is the source of all the love that is born in us.

The door opened and Milial came in. He apologised for his lateness, I for my unduly early arrival. Presently I said to him:

"Is it indiscreet to ask whose portrait that is?"

"It is my mother's," he replied. "She died when she was quite young."

Then it was that I understood the secret of my friend's irresistible attraction.

VI. THE APPLE DUMPLINGS

THROUGH the tall beech-trees that marked the boundary ditches, the sun's rays streamed with autumnal warmth down on to the farm-yard. Beneath the turf, which had been cropped close by cows, the soil was damp with recent rain and yielded slushily under the feet. In the dark green of the grass were scattered pale green apples, which had fallen from the laden boughs of the apple-trees. Four young heifers, tethered in line, were browsing. At times, with a plaintive lowing, they would turn their heads towards the farm-house. The dung-heap in front of the stable was enlivened by the colours and the movement of fowls; scratching and cackling they went from place to place, while the cocks crowed repeatedly, searching for worms, and when they found one, summoning the hens with brisk cluckings.

The wooden gate was pushed open by a man, whose real age was perhaps forty, though he looked like sixty, with his wrinkles, his bent frame, and his long dragging steps, which were made even slower by the weight of his heavy sabots stuffed with straw. He had arms of inordinate length, which hung straight down. As he approached the farm, a yellow dog, tied to the foot of a large pear-tree beside a barrel, which served him for kennel, wagged his tail and began to bark for joy. The man called out: "Down, Finot!" and the dog stopped barking.

A peasant woman emerged from the house. Her broad, flat, bony figure was clearly outlined by her tight-fitting

woollen blouse. Her short, grey petticoat reached as far as the calves of her legs. She wore blue stockings, and her sabots were, like her husband's, stuffed with straw. Under her once white bonnet, now grown yellow with age, straggled some meagre wisps of hair, plastered down on to her head. Her face was weather-beaten, lean and ugly, and her cheeks were sunk in over toothless jaws. She had that type of countenance, unintelligent and boorish, which characterises so many of our rural workers.

"How goes it?" asked the husband.

"The priest says it is all over with him," replied the woman, "and that he won't last the night."

They entered the farm-house and passing through the kitchen, came to the bedroom, which was low-pitched and faintly lighted from a small square window, in front of which a scrap of Norman calico was suspended. The great roof-beams, darkened by age and smoke, crossed the ceiling from side to side, supporting the flimsy flooring of the hay-loft, in which, day and night, swarms of rats trooped to and fro.

The floor was of beaten earth; uneven, damp and shiny; and at the far end of the room loomed the bed, a vague patch of whiteness. Out of the darkness surrounding the couch, proceeded a harsh sound of laboured but regular breathing, rising and falling with the wheezing, whistling, gurgling noises of a broken-down pump. The old man in the bed was the father of the woman, and he was dying.

Husband and wife approached the bed and looked down on the sick man with a placid and resigned expression.

"It is all over, this time," said the son-in-law. "He won't get through the night."

"He has been making that noise ever since twelve o'clock," replied his wife.

They had nothing more to say. The old man's eyes were shut. His face was the colour of earth, and so fleshless that it looked like wood. His mouth was half open, and his breathing was emitted with a rough, croaking sound.

At each respiration, the grey blanket rose and fell with the movement of his chest.

"We must just let him go. We can't do anything. All the same it's very awkward on account of the seedlings. Such fine weather as it is. They have all to be transplanted."

This reflection seemed to cause his wife some uneasiness. After a few moments' thought, she replied:

"He's just going. He won't be buried before Saturday. That will give you to-morrow for your planting out."

Her husband considered the suggestion.

"Yes, but to-morrow I shall have to go round with the invitations for the burial. To get to all those houses from Tourville to Manetot will take five or six hours."

The wife reflected again for two or three minutes.

"It won't take more than three hours. You could begin your round to-night and do all the Tourville side. He can't last out the afternoon, so you may just as well say that he is dead."

After a few moments of perplexity, during which he weighed the advantages and the possible consequences of the suggestion, the husband consented to go. He set out, but turned back and, with some hesitation, said:

"As you've got no other work, you might as well shake down some cooking-apples and make four dozen dumplings for the people who are coming to the funeral. They will want something to cheer them up. You can light the oven-fire with the broken wood lying in the shed by the cider-press. It is dry."

He went from the bedroom into the kitchen, opened the sideboard, and took out a six-pound loaf, from which he carefully cut a slice. Some crumbs fell on the table. He brushed them into the hollow of his palm, and threw them into his mouth, so that nothing might be wasted. Then, with the point of his knife, he scooped a little salt butter out of a brown earthenware jar, and spread it on his bread, which he began to eat with the slowness that characterised all his actions. Crossing the courtyard he

quieted the dog, which had again begun to bark. He came out on the road, which ran parallel to his boundary ditch, and set off in the direction of Tourville.

Left to herself, the woman set about her task. She took the cover off the flour-hutch, and made the dough for the dumplings. This was a lengthy process. She kneaded it, turned it over and over, worked it and pounded it with hands and fists. Then she rolled it all into a great, cream-coloured ball, which she placed on the corner of the table. Next she went to get the apples. To avoid damaging the branches with a pole, she climbed up with the help of a stool. She selected the apples with care, taking only the ripe ones, and heaping them up in her apron.

Hearing someone call her from the road, she turned and saw one of her neighbours, Maître Osime Favet, the mayor, who was setting forth to manure his fields. He was seated in his dung-cart with his legs hanging over the side.

"What can I do for you, Maître Osime?"

"How is your father getting on?"

"Just about dead," she replied. "We have got to get the planting out done, so the burial will be on Saturday at seven o'clock."

"All right. Good luck! Take care of yourself."

In response to his politeness she answered:

"Thank you. And the same to you."

Then she again set to work to gather her apples. On her return to the house, she went to have a look at her father, expecting to find him dead. But even from the threshold she could make out his hoarse, monotonous respiration. It was useless, she judged, to go right up to the bed. It would only be a waste of time. And she turned to her dumplings.

She enveloped the apples, one by one, in a thin covering of dough, and laid them along the edge of the table. When she had made forty-eight of them, and arranged them in four rows of a dozen each, she thought she might as well get supper ready. She hung her iron cooking-pot

over the fire and put on the potatoes; it occurred to her that it would be useless to heat the oven until the following day, the whole of which would be available for her preparations.

Her husband arrived home about five o'clock. The moment he crossed the threshold he asked:

"Is he dead?"

"Not yet," she replied. "He's still making that noise."

They went to look at the old man and found him in precisely the same condition as before. His raucous breathing, as regular as the swinging of a pendulum, was neither quicker nor slower. Second after second it came and went. The tone varied a little, according as he was breathing in or out. Chicot looked at his father-in-law and said:

"He will snuff out when we least expect it, like a candle."

Returning to the kitchen, they sat down to their silent meal. Having swallowed their soup, they each had a slice of bread and butter. Then they washed the plates and returned to the dying man's bedroom. Phémie took a small lamp with a smoking wick and passed it in front of her father's face. But for the breathing one would certainly have taken him for dead.

The Chicots' bed was hidden away at the other end of the room in a sort of recess. They lay down without a word, put out the lamp and closed their eyes. Presently the unceasing rattle of the old man's breathing was accompanied by the deep snores of the husband, and by those of his wife, which were pitched in a higher key. Meanwhile the rats ran about in the hayloft overhead.

. . . . .

The husband awoke at the first signs of daybreak. His father-in-law was still alive. Chicot felt uneasy at the old man's prolonged resistance. He shook his wife to awaken her.

"I say, Phémie, he won't die. What would you do?" he asked, knowing she was a woman of resource.

"He won't last out the day, that's sure," she said. "There's nothing to be afraid of. You see, the mayor won't raise any objection to his being buried to-morrow. He did the same for old Renard, who died just when the sowing was on."

Convinced by this argument, Chicot set out for his fields. His wife baked the dumplings and after that did all the odd jobs about the farm. At noon the old man was not yet dead. The day-labourers, who had been hired for the transplanting, came in and stood in a group round the veteran, who was so slow of departing. Everyone had some remark to make. Presently they went back to work. At six o'clock, when Chicot and his wife came home from the fields, the old man was still breathing, and Chicot fairly took fright.

"Phémie, what would you do now?"

But she could not help him to a decision. They went to see the mayor, who promised to shut his eyes and authorize the interment for the following day. The health officer, to oblige Maître Chicot, undertook to antedate the certificate of death. Husband and wife returned home in an easier frame of mind. As on the preceding night, they went to bed and fell asleep, and their resounding snores mingled with the feebler breathing of the old man.

But when they awoke in the morning, he was still alive.

. . . . .

At this they felt utterly dismayed. They stood by the head of the old man's bed and looked at him suspiciously, as though he had deliberately played them a scurvy trick, deceiving and thwarting them for his own pleasure. What they specially grudged was all the time he had made them lose.

"What shall we do next?" Chicot asked.

Equally at a loss his wife replied:

"It is very annoying, whichever way you look at it."

The guests were sure to arrive punctually. It was therefore impossible to warn them. It was decided to

await their arrival and then explain all the circumstances. They began to appear about ten minutes to seven. The women were dressed in black with long crape veils and all of them looked appropriately sad. The men, ill-at-ease in their Sunday clothes, drew near with more deliberation; they walked in pairs, and chatted about business. The first guests were received by Maître Chicot and his wife, who looked the picture of woe and consternation. Simultaneously they both burst into tears, as they explained their predicament, and set forth the whole story of their embarrassment. They offered chairs all round, fussed apologetically from guest to guest, anxiously trying to prove that no one could have acted otherwise than they had done. They never stopped talking; they had suddenly grown so garrulous that no one else could get in a word. As they went from one friend to another they kept exclaiming:

"I couldn't have believed it. It is incredible that anyone should have lasted like that."

With the disappointment of people who have missed some ceremony they have been waiting to see, the guests sat or stood awkwardly about. Some of them showed an inclination to go away, but Chicot would not have this.

"Never mind, we'll break a crust all the same. Phémie has made some apple dumplings You mustn't miss that."

Faces brightened at this thought, and the mourners began to exchange remarks in low tones. The courtyard became more and more crowded and the first arrivals passed on the news to the late-comers. There was much whispering, but everyone cheered up at the thought of the dumplings.

The women entered the bedroom to look at the dying man. They stepped up to the bed, made the sign of the Cross, muttered a prayer, and went out again. The men were less anxious to witness the spectacle, and contented themselves with a glance through the open window. Madame Chicot went on delivering her observations on her father's death-agony:

"It's two days now that he has been like that. No worse and no better. No higher and no lower. Wouldn't you say it was just like a pump with no water?"

. . . . .

When all present had seen the dying man, their thoughts turned to the collation. There were now more people than the kitchen could accommodate, and the table was therefore taken outside. The four dozen dumplings, golden-brown and appetising, were arranged on two large trays, and attracted every eye. Fearing that there might not be enough to go round, all hastily stretched out their hands to take their share; there were, however, four left over.

Maître Chicot, with his mouth full, remarked:

"If father could see us he would be sorry. He was very fond of dumplings, when he was alive."

A burly peasant observed jovially:

"Well, he won't eat any more of them now. Every man has his turn."

This reflection, far from saddening the mourners, seemed to raise their spirits. It was their turn, they reflected, to be eating dumplings.

Madame Chicot, however, was woe-begone, thinking of the expense. Nevertheless she kept going down to the cellar for fresh relays of cider. Jug followed jug; glass by glass, the contents disappeared, till at last all the guests were laughing and talking, and raising their voices, like people at a banquet. Then an old dame, who had been detained by the old man's bed-side by a painful interest in a fate which would so soon be her own, showed her face at the window and startled them all by exclaiming in a shrill voice:

"He's gone, he's gone!"

A silence fell on all. The women jumped up and went to look.

It was true. He was dead. The death-rattle in his throat had ceased. The men, who were still munching their dumplings, looked at one another uneasily and

lowered their eyes. The old rascal had chosen his moment badly.

The Chicots, however, had dried their tears. Their minds were now at ease.

"We knew," they exclaimed, "that he couldn't last long. If only he had managed to make up his mind last night, there wouldn't have been all this inconvenience."

But no matter. It was finished. The funeral would have to be on Monday, that was all. And there would be another batch of dumplings for them to eat.

The guests took their departure. They talked the matter over complacently; they were glad to have seen what they had seen; and to have enjoyed the Chicots' hospitality.

When husband and wife were left alone, Phémie said, with an expression of extreme distress:

"Now there will be another four dozen dumplings to bake. If only he could have made up his mind last night."

The husband, however, was more philosophical.

To comfort her, he replied:

"Well, it isn't a thing you will have to do more than once in a way."

AHMumtaz
XII/2/57

VII. SHALI

FROM the depths of the easy chair where he seemed to be dozing, rose the quavering treble of old Admiral de la Vallée:

"I once had a little romance; it was a very curious affair. If you like I will tell you about it."

Round his lips played that eternal smile of his, the twisted smile of a Voltaire, which earned for him a reputation for devastating cynicism.

I

When I was thirty, and a lieutenant in the Navy, I was ordered off on an astronomical expedition into Central India. The British Government gave me every assistance and before long, attended by a small escort, I plunged into the heart of that strange country of marvels and prodigies.

It would take a score of volumes to do justice to my journey. I passed through regions of fabulous magnificence, where I was welcomed by princes of superhuman beauty in surroundings of unimaginable splendour. For two months I seemed to be living in a poem; riding on phantom elephants through realms of fancy and discovering fantastic ruins in the depths of enchanted forests. In cities that had all the glamour of a dream, I beheld marvellous buildings, like jewels of exquisite workmanship, delicate as lace, massive as mountains, buildings so divine, so magical, so lovely, that a man falls in love with

them as with a woman and derives from their contemplation a sensuous and physical delight. In short, to quote Victor Hugo, I moved in a waking dream.

At last I reached my destination, Ganhara, once one of the most flourishing cities in Central India, but now in its decline. Its ruler was a wealthy potentate, the Rajah Maddan, a typically Oriental sovereign, despotic, violent, cruel and at the same time generous; refined yet barbarous; gracious yet sanguinary; a blend of feminine charm and ruthless ferocity.

The city lies in the depths of a valley, on the shores of a little lake, which is girt with innumerable pagodas, their walls washed by its waters. From afar, the town appears a patch of white, gradually opening out as the traveller draws near and revealing one by one the domes, the minarets, the spires, the slender, airy pinnacles that lend such grace to Indian architecture.

About an hour's march from the city gates the Rajah sent a guard of honour and a magnificently caparisoned elephant to meet me, and I was conducted with great pomp to the palace.

I asked to be allowed time to change into more ceremonial attire, but the Rajah's impatience would brook no delay. He was eager to make my acquaintance and to discover my possibilities as a source of entertainment. The rest could wait. Passing through groups of bronzed, statuesque warriors, in glittering uniforms, I was ushered into a great hall. Around the walls ran galleries, in which stood men sumptuously clothed and blazing with jewels. On a seat, like a common garden bench with no back to it, covered, however, with a magnificent carpet, I beheld a dazzling mass, a sort of couchant sun. This was the Rajah, who sat there motionless in his robes of glaring canary yellow, waiting to receive me. He was decked with diamonds worth ten or fifteen millions of francs, while on his forehead, in solitary splendour, blazed that famous Star of Delhi, an heirloom of the illustrious dynasty of the Parihara of Mundora, from whom my host

claimed descent. He was a young man of about twenty-five, who, although of purest Hindoo stock, looked as if he had negro blood in his veins. He had large, strong, somewhat dreamy eyes, high cheek bones, thick lips, a curly beard, a low forehead, and sharp, dazzlingly white teeth which he frequently showed in a mechanical smile. He rose to meet me and shook hands in English fashion. Then he made me sit beside him on his bench, which was so high that my feet could barely touch the ground. It was an extremely uncomfortable perch.

He at once suggested a tiger hunt for the following day. He had a passion for hunting and for single combats, and he failed to understand how anyone could possess other interests. He was evidently convinced that I had undertaken my long journey for the sole purpose of ministering to his amusement and of sharing his pleasures. As his good will was essential to the success of my mission, I did my best to humour him. He was so much gratified by my attitude that he insisted on showing me a fight between two champions and carried me off to a sort of arena in the interior of the palace.

At his command two copper-coloured combatants appeared, stark naked, with sets of steel talons, like sharp-pronged rakes, fastened to their hands. They set to immediately, each seeking to claw his adversary with his murderous weapon, until their dark skins were covered all over with hideous gashes dripping with blood. The fight lasted for a long time. Even when their bodies were one mass of wounds, they went on slashing each other. One man's cheek was in ribbons, while his opponent's ear was torn in three. The prince watched the proceedings with savage gusto. He quivered all over with delight, uttered low growls of satisfaction and unconsciously mimicked all the movements of the combatants.

"Hit him!" he kept shouting. "Let him have it!"

At last one of the champions sank to the ground unconscious and had to be removed from the blood-stained

arena. It was over all too soon for the Rajah, who heaved a deep sigh of disappointment and regret. He turned to me, anxious to hear my impressions. Concealing my disgust, I congratulated him warmly.

After this, he gave orders for me to be conducted to the Khoosh Mahal (Palace of Pleasures) where I was to be housed. Passing through the fairylike gardens that grace these regions, I reached my residence. One entire side of this jewel of a palace which was situated on the borders of the royal park, was washed by the waters of the sacred lake of Vihara. It was a square building; and each of its four façades presented three tiers of galleries with exquisitely wrought colonnades. At each corner, rose graceful turrets; some high, some low, some single, some in pairs, no two of them alike in size or form, and looking for all the world like natural flowers sprung from that exquisite plant of Oriental architecture. Each turret was capped with a roof of quaint design, like a coquettish headdress. The massive central dome, from which arose an adorable, slender spike all in delicate openwork, reared towards the sky its cupola, like a swelling breast of white marble. The entire building from base to summit was covered with sculpture, with those exquisite arabesques that ravish the sight, those petrified processions of dainty figures, whose attitudes and gestures perpetuate the manners and customs of India.

The rooms were lighted by windows with perforated arches, opening on to the gardens. The marble floors were inlaid with onyx, lapis-lazuli and agate, in graceful designs of bouquets of flowers.

I had hardly time to change my dress, before a high official of the Court called Haribadada, who had been especially appointed intermediary between the prince and myself, announced a visit from the monarch. The Rajah appeared in his saffron robes, shook hands again, and began to converse volubly, continually pressing me for opinions, which I had great difficulty in producing.

Presently he offered to show me the ruins of the old palace at the far end of the gardens.

It was a perfect wilderness of stone, and haunted by a tribe of large monkeys. As we approached, the male monkeys ran up and down along the walls making horrible grimaces at us, while the females scampered away with their babies in their arms. The king went into fits of laughter, pinched my shoulder to show his amusement, and sat down among the ruins, while all around us on every wall and ledge squatted white-whiskered monkeys putting out their tongues and shaking their fists at us. When he was tired of this entertainment His Saffron Majesty rose and, still keeping me beside him, gravely resumed his walk. He was much elated at having shown me such wonders the very day of my arrival and reminded me of the great tiger hunt, which had been arranged in my honour for the following day.

I took part in that hunt, in a second, a third and a score of other hunts in succession, in the course of which we followed every species of beast which that country harbours—panther, bear, elephant, antelope, hippopotamus, crocodile, and heaven knows what else—at least one half of the entire brute creation, until I was sick and tired of slaughter, utterly weary of the eternal sameness of the sport.

Eventually the Rajah's enthusiasm subsided, and at my earnest entreaty, he allowed me a little leisure for my work. He now contented himself with loading me with gifts. He sent me jewels, wonderful fabrics, performing animals, all of which were presented by Haribadada with as deep a semblance of respect as if I had been the sun himself, though privately he regarded me with deep disdain.

Every day a procession of servants brought me, on covered plates, portions of every dish served at the royal repasts. Every day I had to simulate ecstasies of enjoyment at some new entertainment devised for my amusement; dances of nautch girls; jugglers; reviews of troops,

whatever spectacle suggested itself to the Rajah, with his embarrassing ideas of hospitality, as calculated to impress me with the charm and splendour of his amazing realm. Whenever I was allowed a little time to myself I worked or went to watch the monkeys, whose company I infinitely preferred to that of the king.

One evening on my return from a walk I met Haribadada, looking very solemn, at my palace door. He informed me, in veiled language, that a present from his sovereign awaited me in my room, and he apologised on behalf of his master for his omission to supply long ago a want of which I must have been sensible. After this mysterious utterance he bowed and withdrew.

On entering my room I saw six little girls, lined up against the wall in order of height, stock still, all in a row like larks on a spit. The oldest of them was about eight and the youngest six. At first I did not grasp the purpose for which this infant school had been quartered on me; then I suddenly realised that it was a delicate attention on the part of the Rajah.

I stood there utterly confused and ashamed, confronted with those mites, who gazed at me with their great, solemn eyes, as if already aware of the demands that might be made upon them. I had no idea what to say to them and longed to send them back, but to return a gift of the Rajah's would have been construed as a mortal insult. There was nothing for it but to accept the situation and to keep the children in the palace. They stood perfectly still, staring at me, waiting for orders and trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. That infernal gift! How abominably it embarrassed me! I felt such a fool that at last I said to the eldest one:

"What is your name, child?"

"Shali," she replied.

She was a marvel, this chit of a girl, her smooth skin tinged with the creamy tones of ivory; her face a long oval, pure of line as the face of a statue.

To see what she would say, and possibly with some idea of confusing her, I asked:

"Why are you here?"

In soft melodious tones, she answered:

"I am here to do my lord's bidding."

She had had her instructions, the little creature.

I put the same question to the youngest of the six, who in a still more piping voice, enunciated clearly:

"Master, I am here to do your bidding."

She was a darling, just like a little mouse. I caught her up in my arms and kissed her. Then I sat down on the floor, in Indian fashion, and made them group themselves around me, while I told them a fairy tale about genii, for I could speak their language tolerably well. They listened with rapt attention; thrilling with delight, shuddering with horror, holding up their hands at all the wonderful incidents I related.

When my story was ended I summoned Latchmân, my confidential servant, and ordered him to bring sweets, sugar plums and cakes, which the children ate till they were nearly ill.

I was beginning to enjoy the humour of the situation and thought of all sorts of pastimes to amuse my little sultanas. One of these games, especially, was a huge success. I straddled my legs and my six babies ran through, one after the other beginning with the smallest, and the tallest always bumped against me a little because she would never duck her head sufficiently. This sent them into shrieks of deafening laughter, till the low vaulted roofs of my sumptuous palace, roused to life and penetrated with childlike gaiety, rang with their youthful voices.

I took a keen interest in the arrangements of the dormitory where my six innocents were to sleep. At last I shut the door on them, leaving them to the care of four serving women, whom the Rajah had sent as their attendants.

For a whole week I enjoyed playing papa to these

puppets. We had glorious romps at hide and seek, hot cockles and puss in the corner, which sent them into raptures; every day I taught them another of these new and entrancing games.

My house was now like a girls' school. Arrayed in lovely silks and gold and silver brocade, my little friends ran like tiny human animals up and down the long galleries and flitted in and out of the silent halls, where the light fell softly through the arched windows.

The biggest of them, the child Shali, who was like a statuette of old ivory, became my particular pet. She was an adorable little creature, shy and gentle, yet merry, and soon she loved me with a passionate affection which I returned. The others continued to frisk about the palace like so many kittens, but Shali never left my side, except when I went to visit the Rajah.

We spent delicious hours together among the ruins, surrounded by the monkeys of whom we had made friends. She would sit quietly on my knee, her little sphinx-like head busy with its fancies, or thinking perhaps of nothing at all, but never losing the beautiful, graceful pose, inborn in that subtle, meditative race, the hieratical pose of sacred statues. I always brought a great copper dish of fruit, and the female monkeys, followed by their more timid young, would gradually come as close as they dared and sit round us in a ring, waiting for me to distribute my dainties. As a rule one of the male monkeys, bolder than the rest, would venture near me, holding out his hand like a beggar and I would give him a tit-bit, which he at once took to his mate. At this, all the others broke into furious cries of jealousy and rage and nothing would allay their appalling clamour until I had thrown each animal its share.

I was so much at home among the ruins, that I thought of setting up my little apparatus and working there. But as soon as they caught sight of my brass mathematical instruments, the monkeys evidently took them for lethal

weapons, and fled in all directions, uttering ear-piercing shrieks.

Often I spent the evening with Shali on one of the outer galleries overlooking the lake of Vihara. In silence we watched the radiant moon, scaling the steeps of heaven and casting upon the waters a veil of shimmering silver, and on the opposite bank, the tiny pagodas like a row of fairy mushrooms, their stems rising out of the ripples. I took my little darling's serious face between my hands and bestowed lingering caresses upon her ivory brow, upon her great eyes fraught with all the mystery of that ancient realm of story, upon her serene lips that parted as I kissed them. And I was thrilled with a sensation, vague, compelling, infinitely romantic, as if in the person of this child I embraced an entire race, that beautiful and mysterious race, from which, it seems, all other races have sprung.

Meanwhile the Rajah continued to heap gifts upon me. One day he sent me an unexpected offering, which excited Shali's passionate admiration. It was one of those common little boxes made of cardboard with small shells glued all over the outside and worth, in France, not more than a couple of francs. Out there, however, it was of incalculable value, and doubtless the first that had ever reached that country.

Smiling at the importance attached to this hideous knick-knack emanating from some bazaar, I left it lying on a table. Shali was never tired of gazing at it and admiring it with rapt and reverent eyes.

"May I touch it?" she asked sometimes.

And when I had given her leave, she would raise and lower the lid with infinite precautions, and with her delicate fingers, very gently stroke the coating of small shells as if the mere feel of it thrilled her to the heart with exquisite delight.

My work was now completed and I had to think of my return. I was a long time making up my mind, so loath was I to leave my little friend. But at last I was obliged

to tear myself away. The Rajah was in despair. He arranged a fresh series of hunts and single combats, but after a fortnight of these diversions, I protested that I could postpone my departure no longer and he let me go.

Shali's farewells were heartbreaking. Clinging to me, her face buried on my bosom, her whole form shaken with sobs, she wept inconsolably. I did all I could to comfort her, but my kisses were unavailing. With a sudden inspiration, I rose, fetched the shell trinket box and put it into her hands.

"Take it. It's yours."

Then, at last, I saw her smile. Her whole face glowed with that deep inward rapture that manifests itself when some impossible dream suddenly comes true. She kissed me passionately. But for all that she cried bitterly at the final moment of parting.

After I had bestowed on my other little sultanas cakes combined with paternal kisses, I went my way.

II

After a lapse of two years, the vicissitudes of a sailor's career brought me again to Bombay, where unforeseen circumstances detained me. I was charged with another mission for which I was specially qualified by my knowledge of the country and the language. I completed my work with all possible despatch and as I had still three months in hand, I decided to pay a short visit to my friend the Rajah of Ganhara, and my dear little Shali, whom I expected to find much changed.

The Rajah Maddan welcomed me with frantic ebullitions of delight. He had three champions done to death in my presence and never left me for a single moment during the first day of my arrival. At nightfall, however, I found myself alone, and sent for Haribadada. After plying him with questions on many different subjects,

with the idea of throwing him off the scent, I finally asked:

"And do you know what has become of that little Shali, whom the Rajah presented to me?"

The minister's face clouded, and he replied, in great embarrassment:

"It is better not to mention her."

"Why not? She was a charming little creature."

"She turned out badly, my lord."

"What, Shali? What became of her? Where is she?"

"What I meant is that she came to a bad end."

"A bad end? Is she dead?"

"Yes, my lord. She was guilty of a vile action."

I was deeply moved. My heart was beating violently, while a pang of agony shot through my breast.

"A vile action?" I echoed. "What did she do? What happened to her?"

In ever deeper confusion, he faltered:

"It is better not to enquire."

"But I insist upon knowing."

"She robbed someone."

"Shali? Whom did she rob?"

"You, my lord."

"Me? What do you mean?"

"The day of your departure she stole from you the casket that the Prince had bestowed upon you. She was caught with it in her hands."

"What casket?"

"The one with the shells."

"Why, I gave it to her!"

The Indian gazed at me in stupefaction.

"To tell you the truth, she swore by all that was holy that you had given it to her. But who could believe that you could possibly have bestowed the sovereign's gift upon a slave? So the Rajah had her punished."

"Punished? In what way? What did they do to her?"

"They tied her up in a sack, my lord, and threw her into the lake from that window, the window of this very

room where we are at this moment, and where the theft was committed."

My heart was wrung with the most terrible anguish I have ever endured. I motioned to Haribadada to leave me, so that he should not see my tears.

I spent the night in the gallery overlooking the lake—that same gallery where I had so often sat, with the poor child on my knee. And I thought of her lovely little body, now a mouldering skeleton, tied up in a canvas sack, down there in the depths of those black waters on which we used to gaze together.

In spite of the Rajah's protests and his violent distress, I left the following day.

And now I verily believe that Shali is the only woman I ever loved.

VIII. IDLE BEAUTY

I

A REMARKABLY smart victoria, drawn by a pair of splendid black horses, was waiting at the portico steps of the mansion. It was about half-past five in the afternoon, towards the end of June, and between the roofs of the houses, that overlooked the courtyard, appeared cheerful glimpses of warm, clear sky.

The Countess de Mascaret appeared on the steps, just as her husband came in at the carriage entrance. He paused a moment to gaze at his wife, and he turned a little pale. She was very beautiful with her slender figure, her air of distinction, her large grey eyes, her black hair, the long oval of her face, and the warm ivory tints of her skin. Without one glance at him, as if she had not even noticed his presence, she stepped into the carriage. She moved with such perfect grace and breeding, that the shameful jealousy, which had tortured him all these years, once more stung him to the heart. He raised his hat and went towards her.

"You are going for a drive?"

"As you see."

The words came grudgingly from her contemptuous lips.

"In the Bois?"

"Very likely."

"Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"It is your carriage."

He betrayed no surprise at the tone of her reply, but seated himself at her side and ordered the coachman to drive to the Bois.

The footman jumped up on the box, and the horses

started off, snatching at the bit and prancing as was their wont, until they turned into the street. Husband and wife drove along in silence. He beat about for an opening, but her expression was so forbidding that he did not venture to address her. At last he stealthily slid his hand towards her gloved fingers and touched them as if by chance. The gesture with which she withdrew her arm was so eloquent of resentment and aversion that he was dismayed, for all his arbitrary and tyrannical temper.

"Gabrielle," he murmured.

"What do you want?" she asked without turning her head.

"I think you are adorable."

She made no reply but leaned back in the carriage with an air of offended majesty. They were driving along the Champs Elysées in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile which, at the far end of the great avenue, swung upwards against a background of crimson sky. The sun was shedding a shimmering haze on the mighty archway and on the whole horizon. Two streams of carriages, with the light dancing on the brass and silver of the harness and the crystal of the lamps, were proceeding, one towards the park and one towards the town.

"My dear Gabrielle," exclaimed the Count.

Vexed beyond endurance, she replied irritably:

"Can't you leave me alone? Apparently I mayn't even have my carriage to myself now."

He pretended not to hear.

"I have never seen you looking prettier."

It was clear that her patience was at an end. With a bitterness she could not control, she retorted:

"How unfortunate that you should have noticed it. Because I assure you that I will have nothing more to do with you."

Hurt and bewildered he allowed his customary violence to gain the upper hand.

"What do you mean?" he rapped out, in a voice that suggested the brutal tyrant rather than the tender lover.

Although the sound of the wheels drowned their conversation, she lowered her voice:

"What do I mean? What do I mean? You are at your old games again. Do you want me to tell you what I mean?"

"Yes."

"The whole truth?"

"Yes."

"All my grievances against you, since I first became the victim of your ferocious egotism?"

He had turned red with surprise and chagrin.

"Yes, out with it!" he growled between his clenched teeth.

Tall and handsome, with broad shoulders and a great red beard, aristocrat and man of the world, he was generally considered an excellent husband and father. For the first time since they had left the house, she turned and looked him straight in the face.

"Ah! you will hear some disagreeable truths, but I warn you that I am ready for every contingency and for every threat; I am afraid of no one now, least of all yourself."

He returned her challenging gaze. In a voice that was already quivering with fury, he muttered:

"You must be mad."

"No. But I refuse to remain the victim of the intolerable burden of maternity you have imposed upon me for the last eleven years. Like other women, I claim my right to enjoy my position in society."

Again he turned pale.

"I don't know what you are driving at," he stammered.

"Yes, you do. It is now three months since my last child was born. In spite of your efforts, I have kept my looks and even my figure, as you realised just now when you caught sight of me on the steps. So you think it is time I began again."

"You must be crazy."

"Not at all. I am thirty. We have been married for eleven years and I have seven children. You intend this sort of thing to go on for another ten years. By that time you hope to have no further cause for jealousy."

He seized her roughly by the arm.

"I won't have you talking to me like this."

"You shall hear me out. I mean to have my say. If you attempt to stop me, I shall raise my voice, so that the two men on the box can hear me. My one idea, in letting you come for this drive with me, was to have witnesses, whose presence would oblige you to listen to me and to control yourself. These are the facts. You have always been antipathetic to me, and I have never concealed my dislike. I have never lied to you. You married me against my will. Because you were very rich, you forced my parents, who were in difficulties, to give you my hand. In spite of my tears, they insisted on my marrying you. And so you bought me. I made up my mind to do my duty by you, to forget your intimidating and bullying ways, to become an affectionate companion and a devoted wife and to love you as much as I possibly could. But as soon as I was in your power you grew jealous—as disgracefully jealous as never a man has been. It was an underhand, base, and ignominious form of jealousy, a degradation for yourself and an insult to me. I had not been married eight months, before you suspected me of every conceivable act of treachery. And you actually let me see it. The shame of it! As you could not prevent me from being handsome and attractive, from being mentioned in drawing-rooms, and even in newspapers, as one of the prettiest women in Paris, you racked your brains for a plan to deprive me of all this admiration, and at last you hit upon the outrageous idea of making me spend my life in incessant child-bearing, until I should grow positively repulsive. Oh you needn't protest. It took me a long time to discover it. But at last I began to suspect. You actually boasted of your scheme to your sister, who told me, because she was fond

of me and was disgusted by your boorish brutality. What a life you led me all those eleven years. I was like a brood mare on a stud farm. And as soon as I was in that condition, you yourself shrank from me in disgust and I never saw you for months on end. I was despatched to your country seat, to the back of beyond, there to produce my baby. When, proof against your designs, I returned as blooming and beautiful, as captivating as ever, still able to command the former admiration, just when I hoped for a little respite so that I might enjoy myself like any other young woman of rank and fortune, you were seized with the old jealousy and began to persecute me with the same revolting vindictive desire which is even now tormenting you. It is not the desire to possess me—I should never have refused myself to you—but the desire to disfigure me.

Then came a new and abominable development; it was something so obscure and mysterious that it took me a long time to discover it, but by dint of studying your thoughts and actions I have grown very shrewd. You became fond of your children, because of the peace of mind they secured for you in the months before they were born. Your affection for them is made up of your aversion for myself, of your ignoble suspicions, which thanks to them were temporarily allayed, and of the satisfaction with which you observed the signs of my condition. How often have I caught that gloating look in your eyes; and seen and understood. You love your children, not because they are your own flesh and blood, but because they represent so many triumphs over me, over my youth and beauty and charm, over the flattery which was paid to me openly and the compliments that were whispered in my presence. You are proud of them; you enjoy showing them off when you take them for drives in the brake in the Bois de Boulogne, and for donkey rides at Montmorency. You accompany them to matinées, so that people may see you with them and say to one another: 'What a good father!'"

He had grasped her by the wrist and was squeezing it so savagely that she could not speak. She stifled a groan.

"I love my children, I tell you," he muttered very low. "What you have just told me is shameful in a mother. But you are my property. I am the master—your master. I can make any demands I please upon you, and at my own time. The law is on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in his coarse masculine grip. Livid with pain, she vainly endeavoured to draw her hand from the vice-like hold that was bruising it. The tears rose to her eyes. She was gasping with agony.

"That will show you that I am the master," he said, "and stronger than you."

He relaxed his grasp a little and she was able to command her voice.

"Do you consider me a religious woman?" she resumed.

"Why yes," he said in some surprise.

"Do you think I believe in God?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Do you think I could tell you a lie, if I took an oath before the altar with the Host upon it?"

"Of course not."

"Would you mind entering a church with me?"

"Whatever for?"

"You will see. Will you come?"

"Yes, if you make a point of it."

"Philip," she called to the coachman.

The man, as if lending his ear to his mistress while keeping his eyes on his horses, moved his head slightly in her direction.

"Drive to the church of St. Philippe-du-Roule."

The victoria turned back, just as it had reached the gate leading into the Bois de Boulogne. No further words passed between husband and wife, till the carriage drew up outside the church. The Countess alighted and entered the building, followed by her husband, a pace or two behind. Without a moment's hesitation she advanced

as far as the choir railing. There she fell on her knees, and prayed with her face hidden in her hands. She remained thus for an appreciable time, and presently the Count, who was standing behind her, noticed that she was in tears. She was weeping silently like a woman overwhelmed with some supreme sorrow. Her grief seemed to sweep in waves over her body, each paroxysm ending in a low sob, which she at once repressed with her hand upon her lips.

When the Count felt that the scene had lasted long enough he touched her on the shoulder. She started as if she had been stung. Rising from her knees, she looked deep into his eyes.

"This is what I have to say to you. I am not in the least afraid of you; you can do as you please; kill me, if you like. But one of your children is not your own. I swear it by God, who hears me. It was my one solitary act of vengeance upon you for your abominable masculine tyranny, and for the slavery of child-bearing to which you condemned me. Who was my lover? That you shall never know. You can suspect the whole world. But you shall never find out. I gave myself to him without love, without passion, simply for the sake of betraying you. By him, too, I became a mother. Which is his child? That, too, you shall never learn. I have seven children. You have ample scope for guessing. I always meant to tell you this some day in the distant future, because such a betrayal is no revenge unless the victim is aware of it. You forced me to confess to you this afternoon. That is all I have to say."

She fled down the nave towards the door that opened on to the street. Every moment she expected to hear behind her the swift step of the husband she had defied, and to be felled to the ground by a murderous blow from his fist. But there was no sound, and she reached her carriage in safety. Convulsed with emotion, palpitating with terror, she jumped in and ordered the coachman to drive home. The horses set off at a rapid trot.

II

THE Countess shut herself up in her room and awaited the dinner hour, as a condemned prisoner awaits the moment of his execution. What would her husband do? Had he returned yet? Hasty, tyrannical, prone to every form of violence, what scheme of retaliation had he devised? The house was plunged in silence. She kept glancing at the hands of the clock. Her maid came to dress her for the evening; then left her to herself. Eight o'clock struck, and almost immediately afterwards there was a double knock at her door.

"Come in," she cried.

It was, however, only the butler, who announced that dinner was ready.

"Has the Count come in?"

"Yes, my lady; the Count is in the dining-room."

At first she thought of arming herself with a small revolver, which she had bought with a prevision of the crisis towards which her thoughts were tending. But she remembered that the children would be present, and took only her smelling salts.

When she entered the dining-room she found her husband standing by his chair, waiting for her. They nodded to each other and sat down, and the children followed their example. The three boys and their tutor, Abbé Marin, sat on their mother's right, the three girls and Miss Smith, their English governess, on her left. The baby, who was only three month's old, had been left in the nursery.

The three little girls with their fair hair and their blue frocks, trimmed with narrow white lace, looked like exquisite dolls. They were pretty children, who showed early signs of inheriting their mother's beauty. The eldest was ten, the youngest only three. Two of the boys had chestnut hair, while the eldest, who was nine, was dark. They promised to grow up tall, strong and broad-

shouldered. The whole family seemed sprung from the same vigorous and vital stock.

The Abbé said grace, as was his custom when no strangers were present. When there were guests, the children did not come in to dinner.

In the grip of unexpected emotion, the Countess sat with downcast eyes, while the Count scrutinised, now the three boys, now the three girls, his troubled, anxious gaze wandering from face to face. Suddenly, as he set down his glass, he snapped the stem, and the wine and water poured all over the cloth. The tiny crash made by this trifling mishap so startled the Countess that she half-rose from her chair. For the first time that evening they glanced at each other. From that moment, in spite of themselves, in spite of the shock that convulsed them, body and mind, whenever their eyes met, their glances continued to cross like swords.

Conscious that an embarrassing situation had arisen, through some cause he could not divine, the Abbé endeavoured to make conversation. He touched on various subjects, but his forlorn attempts elicited no response.

Like a tactful woman of the world, the Countess strove to second his efforts, but in vain. Such was her confusion of mind, that the right words eluded her. In the prevailing silence, broken only by the faint clink of silver and china, the sound of her own voice almost frightened her.

All at once her husband leaned towards her and said:

"Here, under this roof, surrounded by your children, will you swear that you told me the truth just now?"

Stung by the hatred that was seething in her veins, she met this challenge with the same undaunted spirit wherewith she had returned his glance. Raising her arms she stretched her right hand towards her sons, her left towards her daughters, and without a tremor in her voice, in calm, resolute tones, she answered:

"I swear by my children that I was speaking the truth."

He sprang up, threw down his table napkin with a

passionate gesture, hurled his chair against the wall and without another word flung out of the room. She drew a deep sigh of relief, as if she had won the first round.

"Don't be frightened, my dears," she said to the children in even tones. "Your father heard some bad news this afternoon and he is still very much upset. He will get over it in a day or two."

She began to talk to Miss Smith and to the Abbé, and she petted the children, lavishing upon them all the tender words, the caresses, the little indulgences, that make a small heart swell with happiness. After dinner, she took all her flock into the drawing-room with her. She encouraged the elder children to chatter, told the younger ones stories, and when bed-time came, she dismissed them with long and lingering kisses. Then she retired to her own room.

She was sure that he would follow her thither and she sat up waiting for him. With her children no longer round her, she was determined to defend her rights as a human being, as she had fought for her social claims. The little revolver, which she had recently purchased, was loaded, and she hid it in the pocket of her gown. The clock struck hour after hour. Gradually all the sounds within the house died away. Through the tapestry covered walls she could hear the distant and muffled sound of cab wheels, passing up and down the streets.

Full of energy and resolution, no longer afraid of him, ready for every emergency, she waited for him. She was almost triumphant in the thought that she had devised for him a torture which would embitter his every moment, until the end of his days.

The first glimmer of dawn stole in through the fringes of the window-curtains. And still there was no sign of him. At last, in amazement, she realized that he would not come. She locked her door and shot the bolt, an additional safeguard, which had been affixed by her orders. Then she went to bed and lay with open eyes, pondering, utterly unable to divine his intentions.

When the maid came in with the early tea, she brought her mistress a letter from the Count. He informed her that he was going to travel for some time, and added, by way of postscript, that his lawyer had been instructed to provide her with sufficient money for her requirements.

III

It was at the Opera, during an interval between the acts of *Robert the Devil.* In the space behind the stalls groups of men were standing about, hat on head, their waistcoats revealing a wide expanse of white shirt-front, on which glittered golden or jewelled studs. They glanced up at the boxes which were occupied by ladies in evening dress, decked with pearls and diamonds, their exquisite faces and dazzling shoulders like hot-house flowers, blossoming forth beneath admiring glances, in an atmosphere of music blended with the hum of human voices. Two friends were standing and talking with their backs to the stage, and examining through their opera-glasses the bevy of beauty and fashion, genuine or meretricious, the jewels, the luxury, the pretentiousness, which, ranged around the great theatre, made so brilliant a display.

"Look at the Countess de Mascaret," said Roger de Salins to his companion. "She is as handsome as ever."

Bernard Grandin focussed his glasses on a lady in the box opposite to them. She was tall and looked in the flower of youth, while her radiant beauty seemed to attract admiration from every corner of the theatre. The ivory pallor of her complexion suggested a statue. Her tresses were black as night and crowned with a rivière of diamonds, which glittered like the Milky Way.

After he had gazed at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with playful conviction:

"As handsome as ever? I should just think she was!"

"About what age would she be?"

"Wait a minute. I can tell you exactly. I knew her

as a child, and I saw her when she first came out. She must be . . . thirty . . . thirty-six."

"Nonsense."

"I am perfectly certain."

"She looks twenty-five."

"And she has had seven children."

"It's incredible."

"What is more, all seven of them are living, and she is a most devoted mother. I go there from time to time. It's a pleasant house, with a very peaceful and wholesome atmosphere. She has performed the miracle of reconciling social and domestic duties."

"How extraordinary! And never a whisper about her?"

"Never."

"But her husband? He's an odd fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes and no. Something may have passed between them. One suspects one of those little dramas of married life, of which one never really knows the facts, though one can hazard a guess."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I hardly know. Mascaret has become tremendously fast, after being an admirable husband. As long as he was steady, he had a shocking temper, and was thoroughly crossgrained and cantankerous. Since he has kicked over the traces, nothing seems to ruffle him. But one would think he had some secret trouble or sorrow, some perpetual worry. Unlike his wife, he has aged very much."

The two friends exchanged some sage remarks concerning those vague, mysterious family troubles arising out of divergences of character or physical antipathies, which were not discernable at the outset.

"It is inconceivable that that woman should have borne seven children," resumed Roger de Salins, who was still watching the Countess through his glasses.

"Yes, and all in eleven years. After that she turned from the task of producing offspring to the more spec-

tacular amusement of displaying herself—a phase which shows no sign of coming to an end."

"These unfortunate women!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Just think, my dear fellow. Eleven years of child-bearing for a woman like that, what hell! All her youth, all her beauty, all her hopes of success, all her romantic dreams of a brilliant future, sacrificed to the abominable law of reproduction, which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for propagating the species."

"What would you have? It's nature."

"Yes. But I maintain that nature is our enemy. We have to be continually resisting her efforts to reduce us to the level of brutes. Whatever on this earth is seemly, comely, delicate and poetic, we owe not to nature, but to man, to the human brain. Thanks to us, thanks to the poets, who have sung and interpreted and praised it; to the artists, who have idealised it, to the scientists, who, in self delusion, have explained it and set forth ingenious reasons for its various phenomena, creation is redeemed by some touch of grace and beauty, some hint of indefinable charm and mystery. Nature has created none but rudimentary beings, swarming with germs of disease, doomed, after a few short years of animal development, to an old age hideous with all the infirmities and disabilities of human decrepitude. Mankind, it seems, is created only to reproduce itself in squalor, and then to die. . . . It is as if a cynical and perfidious creator had schemed to prevent man from ever ennobling, exalting and idealising his relations to woman. But man has invented love, not such a bad rejoinder to the wiles of Destiny, and has so adorned it with poetic fancies, that woman often forgets the gross facts. Some of us, who cannot accept these delusions, have invented vice and brought it to a fine art, which is another way of tricking Providence and rendering homage, however tainted, to beauty. But ordinary mortals beget children, like a pair of animals, mated by law. Look at that lovely creature! Isn't it outrageous

to think that that jewel, that pearl of a woman, born to be beautiful, born to be admired, fêted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in presenting the Count de Mascaret with offspring?"

Bernard Grandin remarked, with a smile:

"There's a great deal of truth in what you say. But few people would understand you."

"Do you know my conception of Providence?" pursued de Salins, warming to his subject. "I picture it as a monstrous and inscrutable intrument of fertility, which scatters millions of worlds through space, just like a fish scattering its spawn all over the sea. It creates, because creation is the divine function. But it works ignorantly. Blindly prolific, it has no notion of all the various combinations that arise out of the germs it has broadcasted. The human mind is simply a fortunte little accident which has somehow sprung from that haphazard fecundity; it is local, ephemeral, unpremeditated, doomed to disappear with the earth itself, and perhaps to emerge again here or elsewhere, different or identical, with new affinities that will manifest themselves in the course of these eternal rebirths. It is thanks to our intelligence, that trifling accident, that we can never feel at home in a world which was not made for such as us, which was never intended to shelter, nourish, and satisfy reasoning beings. If we are really highly sensitive and highly civilised, we are condemned to a never-ending struggle against what are still called the designs of Providence!"

Grandin, who had long been accustomed to his friend's surprising outbursts of imagination, had listened with interest.

"Then you believe that human thought is a spontaneous by-product of blind, but supernatural, parturition?"

"Why certainly. It is due to the fortuitous action of the nerve centres of the brain, analogous to the unforeseen chemical results of new combinations, to manifestations of electricity, produced by friction or unexpected contact, or to any other phenomena originating in the

endless processes of fermentation and fertility, which occur in living matter. My dear fellow, the proof is clear as daylight to any man who looks about him. If the human intelligence was contrived by a reasoning Creator, if it was meant to develop along these lines into something utterly different from the instinct and stolidity of animals, if it was to become this thing so exacting, so questioning, so restless, so harassed, if this world had been destined to harbour man as he is to-day, it would never have been this cramped, inconvenient little paddock, this cabbage patch, this kitchen garden, this rocky jungle-covered sphere, where your improvident Providence has planted us, to live naked in caves and under trees, feeding on the murdered corpses of brother animals, or on raw roots and herbs, that grow in the rain and the sun. A moment's reflection will suffice to make it clear that the world was not made for creatures like us. The mind, which has unfolded and developed itself by some miracle of the nervous force of the brain cells, feeble, ignorant and confused though it is and always will be, dooms us intellectuals to miserable and perpetual exile upon earth.

"Consider the earth, as it was when it was first bestowed upon its denizens. It is obvious that it was planned, with its forests and its vegetation, simply for animals. What does it offer us? Nothing. But it supplies them with everything they need : caves, trees, foliage, springs, lairs, food and drink. Fastidious people, such as I myself, can never feel at ease here. Only those who are near to the brute creation are happy and content. But the rest of mankind, the poets, the sensitive dreamers, the questing, restless souls? Alas for them! I am condemned to eat cabbages and carrots, and even, confound it, onions, turnips, and radishes; we are forced to accustom ourselves to such diet and to acquire a taste for it, because there is nothing else. But it is mere food for goats and rabbits, just as grass and clover are food for horses and cows. When I look at a field of ripe corn, I realise that the earth has brought it forth for the little beaks of

sparrows and larks, and not for my benefit. When I eat bread, I am robbing the birds, just as when I eat poultry, I am robbing the weasel and the fox. Quail, pigeon and partridge are the hawk's natural prey; just as sheep, goats and cattle are that of the larger carnivora. They were never meant for us, though we batten on roasted joints garnished with truffles, which the pigs have rooted out for us. The only business of animals here below is to keep alive. They are at home on this earth of theirs; they are sheltered and fed. They have only to crop the grass or to hunt and devour one another, according to their instincts. The Creator never foresaw gentleness and peaceful ways. He foresaw only the violent end of creatures, bent on destroying and devouring each other.

"As for us, what labour, effort, patience, ingenuity, imagination, industry, what talent, what genius, man has had to spend to make this conglomeration of stones and roots more or less habitable. Only think of all that we have done in spite of nature, in opposition even to nature, to construct a makeshift scheme of life, wholly unworthy of us, with a mere minimum of decency, comfort and decorum. The more intelligent, the more highly civilised and refined we are, the more we have to resist and conquer the animal instincts, which are all that we owe to Providence. Remember that it was left to us to invent civilisation, which includes amenities of every kind and description, from socks to telephones. Think of all the things we see and use every day of our lives.

"To sweeten our brutish lot, we have devised and created every sort of convenience: houses first, then dainty food, confectionery, pastry, wines, liqueurs, materials, clothes, adornments, bedding, mattresses, carriages, railways, and machines out of number. Besides all this, we have discovered the sciences, the arts, as well as writing and verse. Yes, we have created poetry, music and painting. The ideal is our own conception, and so, too, are the delicate refinements of life, the apparel of women, the talents, whereby men have at last contrived

to invest life with a little glamour, to render less crude, less dreary, less rough, the existence of mere reproductive animals, for which alone divine nature called us into being.

"Look round this theatre. It contains, does it not, a whole human society evolved by ourselves, which was never foreseen by destiny, and is not recognised by it. It is intelligible to the human mind only; it is a frivolous, sensuous, intelligent diversion, invented solely for and by those small discontented, restless animals, you and me.

"Look at Madame de Mascaret. Nature intended her to dwell in a cave naked or wrapped in the skins of beasts. Isn't she better as she is? By the way, does anyone know why, or how, her brute of a husband suddenly came to desert such an exquisite companion to run after hussies. Especially after he had been boor enough to inflict seven children upon her."

"My dear fellow, that may be the real explanation. Perhaps he found the privilege too expensive. Considerations of domestic economy may have led him to the same conclusions as your principles of philosophy."

The last act was signalled. The two friends removed their hats and resumed their seats.

IV

Driving home in their brougham after the opera, the Count and Countess de Mascaret sat side by side without exchanging a word. Suddenly the Count broke the silence.

"Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't you think this has gone on long enough?"

"What?"

"The infernal torture you have inflicted on me for the last six years."

"There's nothing I can do."

"Won't you tell me even now which one it is?"

"Never."

"Do you realize that I cannot look at my children, cannot have them round me, without feeling my heart crushed by the uncertainty. Tell me which of them it is. I swear not to revenge myself and not to treat the child differently from the others."

"I have no right to reveal the secret."

"Can't you see that I can stand this state of things no longer? I am obsessed by this thought, this question that I keep asking myself, this doubt that tortures me whenever I look at them. It is driving me mad."

"Then you have really felt it?" she asked him.

"Terribly. Otherwise should I have endured the horror of living with you and the even worse horror of feeling, of knowing, that there is one among the children—which one I can't guess—who embitters my love for all the rest?"

"It has really caused you great suffering?"

He replied in a subdued voice, full of pain.

"I have told you day after day that I am enduring torments. Should I have come back and lived in the same house with you and them, if I did not care for the children? Ah, you have treated me abominably! My one soft spot is for my children, as you very well know. I am the patriarchal type of father, just as I was the patriarchal type of husband. I have always been a primitive man, obeying my natural instincts. You made me frantically jealous, I admit, because you were a woman of a different race, of different soul, and with other needs. Ah, I shall never forget the things you said to me! But from that day onwards, I have never cared for you. I did not kill you, because it would have meant destroying my only hope of ever discovering which of our . . . of your children is not mine. I have been patient, but I have suffered more than you could believe, because I dare not love them, except perhaps the two eldest. I dare not look at them, call them to me, kiss them; I cannot even lift one of them on to my knee without wondering

whether this be the one. For six years I have treated you with courtesy, I may even say with indulgence and consideration. Tell me the truth. I swear that no one shall suffer for it."

It was dark inside the brougham, but he thought that she seemed moved, and he felt that at last she was about to speak.

"I entreat you," he pleaded. "I implore you."

"I may have been more to blame than you think," she said. "But I could not, I simply could not, continue that horrible existence of perpetual child-bearing. There was only one way of driving you from me. I lied before God; I lied when I swore by my children. I have never betrayed you."

In the darkness, he caught her by the arm, and crushed it, as he had done on that terrible drive to the Bois.

"Is this true?"

"It is true."

In spite of his relief from anguish, he groaned:

"Ah, I shall only be plunged again into fresh doubts that will never end. When did you lie to me . . . then, or now? How can I believe you? Who could believe a woman after such an admission? Now I shall never know what to think. I would rather you had said. 'It is Jacques, or, it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage turned into the court-yard and drew up by the portico steps. The Count stepped out of the brougham, and as was his wont, offered his wife his arm to conduct her up the steps. As they reached the first floor he said:

"May I continue our conversation for a few minutes?"

"Certainly."

They passed into a small drawing-room, and a somewhat astonished footman was told to light the candles.

As soon as they were alone he resumed:

"How am I to know the truth? Time after time I have besought you to speak. But you have remained mute, inscrutable, inflexible, ruthless. And now to-day you tell

me that you were lying. For six years you could let me believe a thing like that. No, it is to-day that you are lying. I cannot think why, unless it is out of pity for me?"

In tones of absolute sincerity she replied:

"If I had not lied, I should have had four more children in the last six years."

"You, a mother, to talk like that!" he exclaimed.

"Ah no," she said. "I do not consider myself the mother of children, who have never been born. It is enough for me to be a mother to the children I have and to love them with all my heart. Women are civilised creatures. We are no longer mere females, whose only mission in life is to populate the earth. We refuse to accept that view."

She rose, but he caught her hands.

"One word, one last word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth."

"I have told you the truth. I never betrayed you."

He looked searchingly into that lovely face, into eyes as grey as the wintry sky. In her dark tresses, in the deep night of her jet black hair, the rivière of diamonds glittered like the Milky Way. All at once he seemed to divine intuitively that this glorious creature was not merely a woman destined to perpetuate his race, but the strange and mysterious product of all the complex desires implanted in us in the course of centuries, desires diverted from their primitive and natural end, and blindly seeking a mystic beauty, elusive and half revealed. There are women whose loveliness serves but to inspire our dreams, who are adorned with all the poetry, the glamour, the voluptuousness, the seduction, the æsthetic charm, that civilisation lends to their sex: living statues who inspire not only the fever of the senses, but spiritual yearnings.

Bewildered by this sudden and mysterious revelation, gropingly approaching the secret of his former jealousy and wondering confusedly what it all meant, he stood before her.

"I believe you," he said at last. "I feel that you have now told me the truth. I always had an idea that you were lying to me that day."

"Then we are friends?" she asked, holding out her hand. He took it and raised it to his lips.

"We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Still with his eyes upon her he left the room. He marvelled that she was still so beautiful, and he felt a strange emotion arising within him, an emotion which threatened his peace even more, perhaps, than his primitive passion of earlier days.

[illegible]
4/11/57

IX. THE MURDERER

THE accused's advocate, a young man on the threshold of his career, addressed the Court.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, the facts in this case are not disputed. My client is a respectable man, of gentle and even timid temperament, a clerk of irreproachable character. He murdered his master in an access of rage, which appears at first sight incomprehensible. I ask your permission to analyse the psychology of this crime, if I may so describe the process. I shall extenuate nothing, I shall enter no pleas for my client. I shall give you the facts, and you will then render your verdict.

"The accused, Jean-Nicolas Lougère, is the son of honest parents, under whose care he acquired an ingenuous character and a respectful habit of mind. Respect, gentlemen. That is his crime. In these days, respect is a quality of rare occurrence. It seems to exist only in name. The virtue has gone out of it. Only here and there, in a few unassuming families, which have not kept pace with the times, will you unearth this tradition. It is an austere tradition; it is a religion that may relate either to things or to men, a religion of sentiment or belief, containing an element of sanctity. It is a faith that will tolerate neither a doubt, nor a sneer, nor the merest suspicion of distrust.

"It is impossible to be a respectable man, a truly respectable man, in the full sense of the term, unless one is at the same time respectful. The respectful man goes about with his eyes closed. He has perfect faith. In the legal profession, we have our eyes wide open for every possibility. We spend our days here in a Court of Justice,

which is a social sewer, choked with all the infamies of life. We are the secret recipients of every shameful confidence, the devoted defenders of all human rascality, the upholders, not to say the hired bullies, of all the scamps, male and female, in every shade of society, from princes down to rogues and vagabonds. With tolerance, with complaisance, with smiling good-will, we welcome every criminal, we stand up in front of you and defend him, and if we really love our calling, we adjust our professional sympathy to correspond with the gravity of the crime we are defending. Such a thing as respect cannot hold a place in our minds. We see too much of this flood of corruption, in which the chiefs of the administration, not less than the barest outcasts, are steeped. Too well do we know how everything is contrived and procured and put up for sale. Place, office, distinction, are acquired, either by the frank brutality of a bribe, or with adroit manœuvring, in exchange for titles or for shares in industrial enterprises, or, more simply still, in exchange for a woman's honour. Our duty and our profession force us to shut our eyes to nothing, to suspect everybody, for everybody deserves it. And we are amazed when we are confronted with a man who, like the murderer now before you, is so powerfully imbued with the religion of respect that he has become a martyr to it.

" You and I, gentlemen, have a sense of honour just as we have a sense of personal cleanliness and a horror of what is base. This we owe to our sentiment of personal dignity and pride, but we are far from possessing in our inmost hearts this man's blind, innate, unreasoning faith.

" Permit me to tell you the story of his life.

" He was educated in the fashion, in which all children were once educated. He was taught that there is a clean-cut division in the actions of man. A deed must be either definitely good or definitely evil. The good was displayed to him with an irresistible authority, which forced him to discriminate between it and evil, as between day and night. His father did not belong to that race of superior

intelligences, which view from a lofty standpoint the sources of our beliefs, and comprehend the social exigencies, in which moral distinctions have their origin. The result was that his son grew up pious, unsuspicious, enthusiastic, and narrow. His parents married him at the age of twenty-two to a cousin, who had been educated on similar lines; she had the same simplicity, the same purity. He had the inestimable good fortune to have for wife an honourable and upright woman, one of the rarest and most worshipful of created beings. For his mother he entertained that veneration with which mothers are surrounded in patriarchal families, that profound devotion which is reserved for the Divine, and some measure of this sentiment was extended to his wife. Nor was it weakened even by conjugal familiarity. He lived in absolute ignorance of any form of rascality. His resolute integrity, accompanied as it was by tranquil happiness, made him a being apart. Deceiving no one, he would never have suspected anyone of an intention to deceive him. A short time before his marriage he became cashier in the Bank of Monsieur Langlais, who was recently murdered by him. We have learned, gentlemen of the Jury, from the evidence given by Madame Langlais, by her brother, Monsieur Perthuis, who was a partner in the bank, by the whole family, and by all the senior clerks, that the prisoner, Lougère was a model of probity, obedience, docility, deference and punctuality. He was moreover treated with the consideration due to his exemplary behaviour, and he became accustomed to this homage, not less than to the respect amounting to veneration, which was accorded to Madame Lougère, whose praises were in every mouth.

"Madame Lougère died of typhoid after a few days' illness. Her husband was assuredly affected by profound sorrow, but it was the undemonstrative grief of a well-regulated mind. It was only from his paleness and his drawn features that one could surmise to what extent his loss had affected him.

"It was not long, gentlemen of the Jury, before a very natural thing happened. The accused had been ten years married. For ten years he had been accustomed to feel that there was a woman by his side. He was used to her care of him; he was used to her morning and evening greetings, to the soft rustle of her dress, that delight of every woman, to those caresses, sometimes amorous, sometimes maternal, which brighten existence, to that beloved presence, which makes the hours slip by uncounted. Perhaps he had likewise grown accustomed to the little luxuries of the table and to all those attentions, of which one is hardly conscious, but which gradually become indispensable. To live in solitude was now to him impossible. In order to while away the interminable evenings, he acquired the habit of going to sit for an hour or two in an adjacent drinking-saloon. He would take a glass of beer and, never moving from one place, would with languid eyes, watch through a cloud of tobacco smoke the billiard balls chasing each other across the table. Without any real interest, he would listen to the disputes of the players, the political discussions of those who sat near him, or to the bursts of laughter, which were occasionally provoked by some ponderous jest at the other end of the saloon. Not infrequently he would fall asleep through sheer boredom. All this time, however, there existed in the depths of his heart, in the deep-rooted instincts of his body, an irresistible craving for the heart, for the body, of a woman. Unwittingly, evening by evening, he drew his chair a little closer to the elevated desk behind which the cashier, a small fair-haired girl, sat enthroned. What attracted him to her irresistibly was the fact that she was a woman.

Soon they began to converse. He fell into the habit of passing all his evenings by her side, and this he found very pleasant. She had the gracious and obliging manners, which are the correct convention in that intercourse of smiles and pleasantries. It amused her to keep on filling up his glass as often as possible, and it was good for

business. Lougère thus became daily more attached to this woman, of whom he knew nothing whatever, and he fell in love with her solely because he never met any other women. This young person was very wide-awake, and soon saw that there was capital to be made out of this simpleton, and she set about considering what would be the best way to exploit him. Undoubtedly the cleverest scheme was to make him marry her. This plan she carried out without the slightest trouble.

"Need I inform you, gentlemen of the Jury, that this young person was of the most irregular behaviour? and that marriage, far from acting as a check on her escapades, had the contrary effect of making them more shameless than ever? An innate quirk of female perversity moved her to take a special pleasure in deceiving her husband with all the employees of the Bank. With all of them, I repeat. We have correspondence which proves it. Soon the matter became a public scandal, of which, as usual, the husband knew nothing. At last this creature, with motives not difficult to guess, seduced the nineteen-year-old son of Monsieur Langlais, and was not long in acquiring a deplorable influence over the mind as well as the appetites of this youth. The father, who had hitherto kept his eyes closed—out of the goodwill and friendship he entertained towards his clerk,—felt a natural and legitimate anger at seeing his son in the hands, or, I might say, in the arms of this harpy. He sent immediately for Lougère, and spoke to him while still inflamed with paternal indignation, and there he made a mistake. All that remains for me to do, is to read to you the details of the crime, as taken down from the lips of the dying man and recorded by the examining magistrate.

"'I had just been told that my son had on the previous evening given ten thousand francs to this woman, and my anger outran my discretion. I had certainly never suspected Lougère of dishonesty. Still, there are infatuations which are more dangerous than actual crimes. I therefore sent for him and told him that I felt myself obliged

to dispense with his services. He remained standing before me in a state of consternation. He evidently understood nothing of the matter. Presently, in a somewhat excited manner he asked for an explanation, which I refused him, saying that my reasons were of a private nature. At that he concluded that I suspected him of malversation. He turned very pale and adjured, nay, commanded me, to explain. Indignant at the supposition that I suspected him, he took the liberty of speaking out. On my still refusing to give my reasons, he overwhelmed me with insults and abusive language, and worked himself up to such a pitch of exasperation that I began to be afraid of his assaulting me. Then suddenly he flung at me such an outrageous insult that I let him have the whole truth.

"' He stood still for some seconds staring at me wildly. Then I saw him snatch up from my desk a long pair of scissors, which I use for cutting the margins of some of my registers. He raised his hand, and struck downwards, and I felt something pierce my throat, near the collar-bone. I experienced no pain.'

"Gentlemen of the Jury, that is the plain tale of this murder. What more is there to say in my client's defence? He respected the honour of his first wife, who deserved it, and for that reason he blindly respected the honour of his second wife, who did not deserve it."

After a short deliberation the murderer was acquitted by the Jury.

X. AN ENCOUNTER

It was chance, the purest chance. On the evening of the Princess's reception, every room in the house was thrown open, and Baron d'Etraille, who was tired of standing, had entered a dim, empty bedchamber, opening off the brilliantly lighted drawing-rooms. Aware that his wife would not be ready to leave till daybreak, he was looking for an easy chair where he could go to sleep. As he opened the door, he saw, in the middle of the spacious room, a wide bed with blue and gold hangings, suggesting a catafalque, where love lay entombed, for the Princess was no longer young. On the wall at the head of the bed, loomed a great patch of brightness, like a lake viewed from a lofty window. This was the Princess's mirror, a trusty friend. It was festooned with dark draperies, which could be let down on occasion, but had often been drawn back. It appeared to be contemplating as a confederate the couch above which it hung. Round it seemed to hover memories and regrets, like ghosts of the dead that haunt old châteaux. The Baron half expected to see, flitting across its smooth blank surface, exquisite reflections of rosy limbs, charming gestures of embracing arms.

Smiling and a little moved, the Baron paused on the threshold of this bower of love. Suddenly in the depths of the mirror something stirred, as if the phantoms he had invoked were about to appear to him. He saw a man and a woman rise from their seat on a low divan, which was hidden in the gloom. As they stood there together, reflected in the gleaming crystal, their lips met in a farewell kiss. The Baron recognised his wife and the

Marquis de Cervigné. With all a strong man's self-control he turned and left the room. He waited till daybreak to escort the Baroness home, but all desire for sleep had left him.

As soon as they were alone, he said to his wife:

"I happened to see you just now in the Princess de Reyner's bedroom. I need hardly explain myself further. I have no taste for recrimination and scenes, or for making myself ridiculous. To avoid all that sort of thing, we will quietly arrange to separate. My lawyers will regulate your position according to my instructions. When you are no longer under my roof you will be free to do as you please. But as you will still bear my name, I warn you that if your conduct gives rise to any scandal, I shall have to take severe measures."

She attempted to reply, but he silenced her, bowed and withdrew to his own room. He was hurt and surprised, rather than sad. In the early days of their married life, he had been very much in love with his wife. Gradually, however, his passion had cooled, and though he still had a mild predilection for the Baroness, he followed the dictates of his roaming fancy, whether in society or in the theatrical world. The Baroness was very young, barely twenty-four, small, unusually fair, and thin—almost too thin. She was one of those little Parisian dolls, dainty, spoilt, exquisite, coquettish, sufficiently intelligent, possessing charm rather than beauty.

"My wife," remarked the Baron confidentially to his brother, "is very sweet and seductive . . . but there's nothing of her. She's like a glass of champagne, all froth. What there is of it is delicious, but there isn't enough."

Busy with painful thoughts, he paced up and down his room. At times a gust of anger swept over him, and he felt a savage longing to break the Marquis's neck or to go up to him in the club and punch his head. Then he realized that it would be bad form, that the laugh would be against himself rather than his supplanter, and that,

after all, his resentment arose from wounded vanity rather than a broken heart. He went to bed, though he did not sleep. A few days later all Paris knew that a separation, by mutual consent, had been arranged between the Baron and Baroness d'Etraille on grounds of incompatibility of temper. The matter gave rise neither to rumours, gossip nor conjectures.

To avoid embarrassing meetings he travelled for a year, spent the following summer at the seaside, and the autumn shooting, and did not return to Paris till the winter. Not once did he see the Baroness. He knew, however, that there was no gossip about her. She was evidently careful to observe the conventions, which was all he asked of her. Bored with Paris, he set off again on his travels. Then he spent two years restoring his country seat, the Château de Villebosc; after this he gave a series of house parties, which whiled away at least fifteen months. At last, weary of that tedious form of entertainment, he returned to his mansion in the Rue de Lille, exactly six years after his separation from his wife. Now, at forty-five, with a tendency to stoutness and not a few white hairs, he was visited by that peculiar melancholy which afflicts men, once handsome, courted and adored, who feel their fascinations waning day by day.

A month after his return to Paris he caught a chill, as he emerged from his club, and developed a cough. The doctor ordered him to Nice for the rest of the winter. Accordingly, one Monday evening he caught the Riviera express. He cut it so fine that when he arrived at the station the train was already in motion. He threw himself into the first carriage he saw with a vacant seat. The far corner was already taken, but its occupant was so closely muffled in coats and furs that he could not make out as much as the sex of his fellow traveller, who seemed a mere bundle of wraps. At last he gave up the problem and settled down for the night. He put on his travelling cap, tucked his rugs round him, lay back and went to sleep. It was daybreak when he awoke. He again shot a

glance at his companion, who had not stirred all night and who still seemed fast asleep.

Monsieur d'Etraille seized the opportunity to make a hasty toilet. He brushed his hair and beard and did his best to efface the ravages, which night inflicts upon the face of middle age.

"O glorious youth, how splendid are thy dawns!" quoth the poet.

Ah radiant youth, springing from its couch with glowing skin, bright eyes, hair shining with vital sap!

Ah melancholy awakening, when lack-lustre eyes, flushed, puffy cheeks, swollen lips, straggling hair and tangled beard invest the face with the drawn and weary aspect of age!

The Baron opened his suit case, took out his brush and tried to make himself presentable. Then he waited.

The train whistled and came to a halt, which roused the Baron's companion, who stirred a little. Presently the train went on. A slanting ray of sunshine penetrated into the carriage and glided across the sleeper, who moved again, and after a succession of little nods, like a chicken emerging from its shell, calmly unveiled and sat up. The mysterious traveller proved to be a woman, fair-haired, blooming, and remarkably pretty and plump.

The Baron gazed at her in amazement. He could hardly believe his eyes. Really he could have sworn that it was . . . that it was his wife, but his wife so astonishingly altered . . . for the better. She had put on weight . . . quite as much as he himself . . . but in her case what an improvement it was!

She looked at him placidly as if she did not recognize him and calmly proceeded to lay aside her wraps. She had the poise of a woman who is sure of herself, the insolent complacency of one, who awakes looking her best and freshest.

The Baron lost his head completely.

Could it be his wife, or was it some other woman resembling her as closely as a sister? As it was six years

since he had seen her, he might well be mistaken. She yawned and he recognized her way of doing it. Again she turned to him and surveyed him with an expression of calm indifference, without a hint of recognition. Then she looked out of the window. Bewildered, terribly perplexed, he kept stealing glances at her, while he stubbornly awaited developments.

Confound it! of course it was his wife! How could he doubt it? No two women had a nose like that.

A thousand memories stirred within him, memories of past caresses, of tiny details of her person. There was that beauty spot on her back which was matched with another on her bosom. How often he had kissed them! The old sense of intoxication stole over him, as he recalled the fragrance of her skin, her smile when she threw her arms round his neck, the soft inflections of her voice, and all her coaxing ways. But what a change! What a wonderful change! It was she and yet not she. She had matured and developed. She was more feminine, more seductive, more desirable . . . more exquisitely desirable than ever.

Then this unknown, this mysterious woman, met by chance in a railway carriage, was his, legally his. He had only to say to her: "Come!" Once he had slept in her arms, and her love had filled his life. Now he had found her again, changed almost beyond recognition. It was she herself, but at the same time it was someone quite different: someone who had budded, ripened, bloomed after he had left her, and yet, for all that, it was his old love still.

Her pose was more studied; her features were more marked; her gestures, her smiles, more sedate, less playful; nevertheless each trait was familiar. Two women were blended in one; the strange, new element mingling freely with the cherished memory. It was a curious sensation, thrilling, intoxicating, tinged with the mystery of love and with delicious confusion. It was his

wife, reincarnated in a new form, in a new body, which his lips had never touched.

After all, he reflected, in six years the human frame undergoes a complete change. Only the contours of the figure remain and even they are subject to alteration. The blood in our veins, our hair, our skin,—everything is renewed, replaced.

When two friends meet after long absence, each is confronted with an entirely different person, though he bears the same name and the same individuality. The heart itself may change. Ideas may be modified, principles altered, so that in a space of forty years, by processes, gradual but insistent, we may be transformed four or five times from one personality into another utterly new.

Thus he mused, stirred to the very soul. Suddenly there flashed upon him the memory of that evening when he had surprised her in the Princess's bedroom. He felt no thrill of anger. She, whom he now beheld, was no longer the same woman, the same slight, fragile, vivacious doll of those distant days.

What should he do? How should he address her? And did she recognise him?

When the train halted again, he rose from his seat and bowed to her.

"Bertha," he began, "is there anything you would like . . . anything I can bring you?"

She looked him up and down without a shade of surprise, embarrassment or resentment in her glance.

"No thank you," she said with calm indifference, "nothing at all."

He left the carriage and walked up and down the platform, actuated by an impulse to move his limbs and to pull himself together, as if after a fall. He deliberated as to what he should do. Transfer himself to another carriage? No, it would look like flight. Court her, pay her attention? No, she would think he was asking her pardon. Be masterful? No, he would only seem a brute,

and besides, surely he had forfeited his rights. He returned to the carriage.

During his absence, she, too, had made a hasty toilet, and was now leaning back in her seat, radiant and serene. He turned to her.

"My dear Bertha," he began, "as Fate has brought us together again in this curious way after six years of a separation which was perfectly amicable, need we continue to glare at each other like a pair of mortal enemies? Here we are, for better or for worse, shut in together, tête-à-tête. Personally I don't propose to go away. Wouldn't it be pleasanter to chat like . . . like . . . friends . . . for the rest of the journey?"

"Just as you please," she rejoined calmly.

He was at a loss how to continue. Then plucking up his courage he took the seat beside her.

"I see I shall have to pay court to you," he said ingratiatingly. "Very well. It will be a pleasure, for you are looking enchanting. You have no idea how wonderfully you have improved in the last six years. There's no woman to whom I owe such a thrill of delight as I felt just now when you slipped off your furs. Really I could never have believed such a change possible."

"I can't say as much for you," she replied without turning her head to look at him. "You haven't worn at all well."

"How unkind you are!" he replied, smiling ruefully and reddening.

"How so?" she asked, with a glance at him. "I was merely stating a fact. Surely you're not thinking of making love to me. So what does it matter whether I admire you or not? But evidently it's a painful subject. Let us talk of something else. What have you been doing all these years?"

"Why," he faltered, completely out of countenance, "I have spent my time travelling and hunting, and, as you see, growing old. And you?"

"Carrying out your orders and keeping up appearances," she answered serenely.

An angry retort rushed to his lips, but he repressed it, and raising his wife's hand kissed it.

"I am very grateful to you," he murmured.

She was taken aback. Really he was admirable; his self-control never failed him.

"As you were so kind as to respect my wishes, suppose we talk now without any bitterness?"

"Bitterness?" she queried with a little gesture of disdain. "I don't feel any bitterness. To me, you are the merest stranger. I was merely trying to put a little life into a difficult conversation."

Fascinated by her, inspite of her cynical attitude, conscious of a savage, irresistible impulse to master her, he continued to gaze at her.

Fully aware that she had hurt him, she pursued relentlessly:

"How old are you now? I always thought you were younger than you seem to be."

He turned pale.

"I'm forty-five."

Then he added:

"I haven't asked you for news of the Princess de Reyner. Do you still see her?"

She threw him a venomous glance.

"Yes, certainly. She is quite well, thank you."

Both of them stung to the quick, they sat side by side, their hearts in a tumult.

"My dear Bertha," he suddenly exclaimed, "I have changed my mind. You are my wife and I insist on your returning to my protection this very day. It seems to me that you have gained both in beauty and character, and I propose to take you back. I am your husband and I claim my rights."

Thunderstruck she gazed into his eyes, seeking to read his thoughts. But his face was impassive, inscrutable, resolute.

"I am very sorry," she replied, "but I have other engagements."

He smiled.

"That is unfortunate. I shall avail myself of the powers the law allows me."

They were approaching Marseilles. The train whistled and slowed down. The Baroness rose and calmly rolled up her wraps.

Then she turned to her husband.

"My dear Raymond, do not try to take advantage of a tête-à-tête which I myself manœuvred. In deference to your wish, I was merely taking certain precautions to safeguard myself against you and the world in general . . . just in case . . . you're going to Nice, are you not?"

"I shall go wherever you go."

"I think not. If you will only listen to me, you will be perfectly ready to leave me in peace. In a few minutes you will see the Prince and Princess de Reyner and the Count and Countess Henriot, who will be at the station to meet me. I wanted them to see you and me together so as to convince them that we two spent the night alone together in this compartment. Don't be alarmed. The two ladies will lose no time in spreading abroad this astonishing item of news. I told you just now that I had carried out your instructions and carefully observed the conventions. There was no question of anything else, was there? Well, in the interests of propriety I arranged this tête-à-tête. You particularly ordered me to avoid a scandal. Well, my dear Raymond, I have done so . . . You see . . . I am afraid . . . I am afraid . . ."

She paused till the train drew up. Then, as a troop of her friends rushed to the carriage door and opened it, she completed her phrase:

"I am afraid I'm going to have a child."

The Princess held out her arms to embrace her, but the Baroness drew her attention to her husband, who was dumb with amazement and vainly endeavouring to arrive at the truth.

"Don't you recognise Raymond? He is certainly very much changed. He offered to escort me, so that I shouldn't have to travel by myself. Sometimes we indulge in these little escapades. For we're very good friends, although we can't live together. But this is where we part. He has had enough of me already."

She held out her hand, which he clasped mechanically. Then she jumped down on to the platform into the midst of her friends, who had come to meet her.

Too much agitated to utter a single word, or to take any action, the Baron slammed the door. He could hear his wife's voice, her merry laughter, as it died away in the distance.

He never saw her again.

Was she lying? Was she speaking the truth? He never knew.

XI. THE HORLA

8th May.

What a glorious day! I have spent the whole morning lying on the lawn in front of my house, under the spreading plane tree which shelters and shades it entirely. I love this country-side, where I have my roots, those deep-reaching, delicate fibres, which attach a man to the land where his ancestors were born and died, which link him to the local ways of thought, local diet, local idioms, to the intonations of the country-folk, to the odours of the soil, the village, the very atmosphere.

I love this house of mine, in which my childhood was passed. From end to end, my garden skirts the river Seine. I have only to look from my windows across the road to see that great and noble river, covered with the shipping which passes up and down between Rouen and Havre.

Yonder on my left lies Rouen, the great slate-roofed city. From it rises a spiky forest of Gothic belfries, too numerous to count. Some are slender, some are massive, and over them towers the iron spire of the Cathedral. Their bells ring out in the misty blue of exquisite mornings. The distant music of clanging iron or sonorous bronze is borne to my ears, varying in volume as the breeze rises or falls.

What a beautiful morning it is!

About eleven o'clock a long convoy of ships moves upstream, towed by a tug-boat no larger than a fly, which pants and groans under the strain, and vomits out dense clouds of smoke. Next come two English schooners, with their red ensigns fluttering in the breeze, and after

them a superb Brazilian three-masted ship, painted white all over and beautifully spick and span. The sight of her gave me so much pleasure that for some reason or other I saluted her.

12th May.

I have been feverish for the last few days. I am feeling unwell, or, to be more precise, out of spirits.

What is the source of these mysterious influences which convert our happiness into depression and our confidence into anxiety? It would seem as if the air, the invisible atmosphere, were charged with forces which we can never know, and as if we were subjected to strange effects from their proximity. I sometimes wake in the morning so full of gaiety that I can hardly repress my desire to sing. What is the cause of this access of cheerfulness? Then perhaps I take a walk along the river bank, and in a moment my high spirits have vanished. I turn homewards in a woebegone frame of mind, as though I expected to hear of some misfortune, as soon as I set foot in my house. Why should I feel like this? Is it merely because a cold current of air has breathed upon me, affecting my nerves and throwing a dark shadow over my soul? Have my thoughts been perturbed by the shape of the clouds, the aspect of the day, the ever-varying colours of the objects that pass before my eyes? Who can explain it? Although the mind is unaware, our whole environment, everything we see, everything we brush past without realizing, everything we touch subconsciously, in short all that our senses encounter without discernment, has on ourselves and on our organs and, through the latter, on our ideas and on our soul itself, rapid, astonishing and inexplicable effects.

How profound is the mystery of the invisible! To sound its depths we use in vain our contemptible equipment of senses; our eyes fail to perceive a thing because it is too small or too large, too near or too far. The

dwellers in a star are as invisible to our eyes, as the bacteria in a drop of water. Our ears are ever deceptive, because they convert mere atmospheric vibrations into musical tones; they are wizards, who perform this miracle of transmitting mere oscillatory movement into sound, and by this metamorphosis give birth to music, which changes nature's silent vibrations into audible notes. Our sense of smell is feebler than that of a hound. Our sense of taste hardly serves us to decide the age of a wine. Ah! if only we were endowed with other senses, which would perform other wonders for us, how much more widely could we appreciate our surroundings!

16th May.

I am not well. There is now no doubt about it. And last month I was in such splendid health. I am dreadfully feverish, or rather, I am suffering from a febrile languor, which affects mind no less than body. I am continually obsessed by a terrifying sensation of menacing danger, of impending disaster or approaching death. These presentiments are doubtless the herald of some evil yet undeclared, which is germinating in my frame.

18th May.

I have just returned from a consultation with my doctor, whom I went to see, because I was suffering from sleeplessness. His examination revealed an unduly quick pulse, dilated pupils, and disordered nerves, but there was no indication of anything serious. I am to have a course of showerbaths and take bromide of potassium.

25th May.

No change. My condition is certainly curious. As evening approaches, I am possessed by an incomprehensible restlessness, just as if the coming darkness held for me some terrible menace. I hurry through my dinner, after which I try to read a book, but I cannot understand

the words, indeed I can hardly distinguish the letters. I pace my drawing-room in all directions; I am under the malign influence of some vague, irresistible fear, which makes me dread not only sleep itself, but even my bed.

I go up to my bedroom at about two in the morning. The moment I enter I double-lock the door, and shoot the bolts. I am afraid . . . but of what? . . . I have never been a timid man . . . but now I open my wardrobe, I look under the bed, I listen . . . listen . . . for what? How strange it is, that a mere indisposition, a defect of the circulation, the irritation of some fibre, a slight congestion, some minute disturbance in the imperfect and delicate mechanism of the body, can afflict the most cheerful of men with melancholy, and convert a brave man into a coward. And, later, when I actually go to bed, I await the coming of sleep, as one would await the arrival of one's executioner. I anticipate its approach with horror. My heart beats faster, my limbs tremble, my whole frame shivers even under the warm blankets, and this lasts, until the moment when I suddenly succumb to sleep. I am plunged into it, as a man is plunged into a pit of stagnant water and drowned. I do not feel myself dozing off as I used to do. The sleep that comes upon me is a perfidious thing. It lurks near me; it watches me like a spy; it is like someone, who is waiting to seize me by the head, to close my eyes, and thrust me into oblivion.

I sleep for an appreciable time, some two or three hours. Then a dream . . . no, a nightmare, strangles me. I am fully aware that I am lying asleep in bed. I not only feel it, but see it. And I feel, too, that there is someone creeping towards me—someone who looks at me, passes his hands over me, climbs up on to the bed, kneels on my chest, grasps my throat with both hands, and squeezes . . . squeezes . . . with all his might, in an effort to strangle me. I struggle and struggle. It is all that I can do. I am bound hand and foot by that horrible impotence, which paralyzes us in our dreams. I try to cry out but I cannot make a sound. I endeavour to move, but in vain. I make

the most fearful efforts; I strive to turn over and hurl off this being, that is crushing and smothering me. But all my struggles are of no avail. Then suddenly I awake, with my mind distraught and my body bathed in perspiration. I light a candle. But there is nobody there.

This nightly crisis past, I fall into a peaceful slumber, which lasts till dawn.

2nd June.

I am getting worse and worse. What can be wrong with me? The bromide has done me no good; the shower-baths have no effect. One day, in order to induce physical fatigue, though I was weary enough already, I went for a walk in the forest of Roumare. At first I believed that the cool woodland air, so pure and balmy with the perfume of leaves and grass, would renew the blood in my veins and imbue my heart with fresh energy. Entering the forest by a great riding avenue, I turned off towards La Bouille, down a narrow path which lay between two ranks of giant trees. Their arching branches formed a green roof, dense and sombre, shutting out the sky. I was suddenly afflicted with a shivering fit, which was not the result of chill, but an inexplicable shudder of apprehension. I felt ill at ease, all alone in the wood, and I hastened my steps. The profound solitude begot in me blind, unreasoning terror. Then all of a sudden the conviction came over me that I was being followed. Someone was treading on my heels, so closely as almost to touch me. I turned sharply. But there was no one there. The wide, straight avenue of towering trees was empty, with an emptiness that daunted me. Behind me, before me, in either direction, it ran on and on, monotonous and terrifying, until it was lost in the distance.

I closed my eyes, I know not why. And I began to spin round on one heel, very quickly, like a teetotum, till I nearly fell. When I opened my eyes again, the trees

were swaying, the solid ground was undulating. I had to sit down. I could not remember the way by which I had come. I positively had no idea. An absurd situation! Haphazard, I set off to the right, and presently found myself again in the main avenue, by which I had reached the heart of the forest.

3rd June.

A dreadful night. I am going away for a few weeks. A little travelling will doubtless put me right.

2nd July.

Home again, and fully restored to health, besides which, I have had a delightful trip. I went to Mont Saint-Michel, a place I had never yet visited. If you arrive at Avranches about sunset, as I did, a vision of beauty rewards you. The town of Avranches is situated on a hill. I was shown the way to the public gardens, which are at one end of the little city, and the view from this point provoked from me a cry of amazement. A prodigiously wide arm of the sea lay before me. On either side of it the coast line stretched out until lost to view in the haze. In the midst of this immense expanse of water, tawny under a cloudless, saffron sky, a weird and sombre hill soared upwards from the sandy shallows. The sun was setting. The silhouette of this fantastic rock, bearing upon its summit a structure not less unearthly, stood out sharply against the flaming sky.

At dawn on the following day I set out for the Mount. The tide was low, as on the previous evening. The nearer I drew, the more impressively did this astonishing Abbey stand out. After a walk of several hours, I reached the enormous congeries of rock with its group of houses and the great church towering above it. I climbed the steep and narrow street and entered the Abbey, the most perfect masterpiece of Gothic architecture ever created for the dwelling-place of God on earth. Great as a city, it has a

series of low-pitched halls with massive, vaulted roofs, and lofty galleries supported on slender columns. It is a gigantic jewel, hewn out of granite; yet delicate as a wisp of lace. There are towers everywhere; and winding staircases which lead upwards into slender belfries. Into the azure sky of day, or into the dark firmament of night, these belfries soar. Their grotesque roof-lines bristle with chimæras, devils, fantastic beasts, prodigious flowers; and each belfry is linked to its neighbour by a graceful arch of wrought stonework.

When I reached the summit, I said to the monk who was acting as my guide:

"Father, you ought surely to be happy here."

"It is a windy spot, sir," he replied.

We entered into conversation, while we watched the rising tide course across the sand, covering it with a breastplate of steely blue. The monk told me legend after legend, all old stories of the Mount. One of them specially impressed me. The natives of the place assert that human speech is often heard on the sands at night, and the bleating of two goats, one with a strong voice and the other with a weak one. The incredulous maintain that the sounds are the cries of sea-birds which sometimes resemble the bleating of goats and at other times plaintive human cries. But fishermen, coming home late at night, vow that they have met an old shepherd roaming over the sands at low water and prowling round the little settlement, which has been planted so far away from the world. This ancient shepherd wears his cloak over his head, so that no one has ever seen his face. He walks on ahead, leading his two goats, one of which has the face of a man and the other that of a woman. Both animals have long white hair, and they never cease from talking and wrangling in an unknown tongue, except when they suddenly break off to bleat with all their might.

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk.

"I cannot tell," he replied.

To this I rejoined:

"If there were really such strange beings on earth, how is it that we have not found out all about them long ago? Wouldn't you and I have seen them?"

"Do you imagine," he replied, "that we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Consider for example the wind, which is the greatest of the forces of nature. It knocks men down, demolishes houses, uproots trees, stirs up the sea into mountainous waves, breaks away the cliffs, and drives great ships on to the breakers. The wind whistles, groans, bellows, sometimes it even kills. Have you seen it? Will you ever see it? It exists nevertheless."

I made no reply to this ingenuous logic. The man might be a sage, or, on the other hand, a fool. Far be it from me to decide. In any case, he succeeded in silencing me, for his remarks agreed closely with certain reflections of my own.

3rd July.

I slept badly. I am sure there is a morbid influence at work here. My coachman has had the same symptoms as myself. On my return home I noticed his singular pallor and I asked him:

"What is the matter with you, Jean?"

"Somehow, sir, I can't get to sleep. I have had something hanging over me like a spell ever since you went away."

The other servants, however, seem in good health. What I am afraid of is a return of the same symptoms in myself.

4th July.

There is no doubt about it. It has seized upon me again. My former nightmares have come back. Last night I felt that there was someone squatting on my chest. His mouth was on my mouth and he was drinking my life from between my lips. He was draining my

vitality like a leech. Then, when he had had his fill, he rose and left me, and I awoke. I was too prostrate, too crushed and exhausted to move. If this continues I shall go away again.

5th July.

Have I lost my reason? The events of last night are so strange that my head reels when I think of them. I had locked my bedroom door, as is now my nightly practice. Being thirsty, I drank half a tumbler of water, and in doing so I happened to notice that my water-bottle had been filled right up to the crystal stopper. When I went to bed, I fell into one of my frightful dreams. Two hours later I was roused by a horror that was even more terrible than the nightmare itself. Imagine the condition of a man, who is being murdered while he sleeps. He awakes with a knife through his lungs, with the death rattle in his throat. He is bathed in blood. He struggles in vain for breath; he is in the very article of death; and yet he understands nothing of what is happening. That was my case. My reasoning powers at last returned to me. Feeling thirsty again, I lit a candle and went towards the table, on which I had put my water-bottle. I lifted it and tilted it over my tumbler. Not a drop came out. It was empty. Absolutely empty. For the moment I was utterly bewildered; but very soon I was conscious of such poignant emotion that I sank, or rather, collapsed into a chair. Then I leaped to my feet and cast a look around me. Aghast with amazement and terror, I sat down in front of the crystal decanter, and gazed at it intently, trying to solve its mystery. My hands were shaking. Someone must have drunk the water. But who? I myself? Yes, surely it must have been I. In that case I was a somnabulist. Unconsciously I was living that mysterious, double life which makes us wonder whether there are two selves within us, or whether some alien personality, elusive and invisible, seizes the moment when

the soul is heavy with sleep, takes possession of the body, and exacts from it an obedience equal to, or greater than, that which it yields to the rightful owner when awake.

Ah, who can realize my unspeakable anguish? Who can understand the consternation on the part of a man, sane, fully awake, and with all his mental powers about him, gazing at a glass carafe and searching terror-stricken for the water it should contain. I did not dare to go back to bed, but remained sitting where I was until daybreak.

6th July.

I must be going mad. Again the contents of my water-bottle have been drunk by someone during the night. Was it I myself? Was it I? Who else could it be? Who indeed? Oh my God! I am going mad. Who will deliver me?

10th July.

I carried out some tests, with surprising results. The conclusion that I have come to is that I must be insane. And yet? On the 6th July, before going to bed, I placed on my table the following things: wine, milk, water, bread and strawberries. Somebody, possibly I myself, drank up all the water and a little of the milk. The wine and the strawberries were not touched. On the 7th July I repeated the experiment, with the same result. On the 8th July, I omitted the water and the milk. Nothing was touched. And finally on the 9th July I put only water and milk on the table, but I took the precaution of wrapping up both carafes in pieces of white muslin, and tying the stoppers on with string. Then I rubbed my lips, my moustache and my hands with black lead. After this I went to bed. The usual heavy sleep fell upon me, followed presently by the customary, horrible awakening. I had not moved at all. Even the sheets had no trace of the

black lead. I untied the string. I was palpitating with terror. All the water had been drunk! And all the milk too! Ah! my God! . . . I am leaving immediately for Paris.

12th July.

Paris. Seemingly I was out of my mind those last few days. I must have been the plaything of my sick fancies, unless I am really a somnabulist, or have been subjected to one of those influences, which we know to exist, but cannot yet explain, and which we call suggestions. In any case, although my mental disorder was verging on dementia, twenty-four hours of Paris have sufficed to restore my balance.

Yesterday I did some shopping and paid a few calls, and found my mind greatly vivified and refreshed thereby. In the evening I went to the Théâtre-Français, and saw a play by Alexandre Dumas the younger. My cure was completed by that vivid and commanding genius. Undoubtedly solitude is dangerous for the overwrought intellect. One needs the companionship of men and women, who can both think and express their thoughts. If we are left too long alone, we people the void with phantoms. In excellent spirits, I strolled back by the boulevards to my hotel. Amidst the elbowings of the crowd I could smile ironically at my terrors and fancies of the preceding week, when I had believed, actually believed, that there was an invisible being who shared my house with me. How feeble is our self-control, how quickly we are scared and bewildered when we are brought up against the tiniest manifestation of the unknown! Instead of coming to the obvious conclusion that if one does not understand, it is merely because the cause is hidden, one forthwith imagines terrifying mysteries and the workings of supernatural powers.

14th July.

The National Festival. I walked abroad through the streets, and took a childish delight in the fireworks and decorations. Still, it is a silly business, being joyful to order, on a date fixed by Government decree. The public are an imbecile herd, oscillating between patient stupidity and revolutionary ferocity. They are ordered to amuse themselves and they proceed to amuse themselves; to wage war with an adjoining country, and they wage war accordingly; to vote for an Emperor, and forthwith they vote for an Emperor; to vote for a Republic, and, behold, they vote for a Republic.

The leaders of the people are equally besotted, only instead of obeying men, they obey principles, which are *ipso facto* childish, barren and ill-grounded because, generally speaking, these so-called principles are supposed to be invariable, and this in a world where one can be sure of nothing, where even light is an illusion, and sound itself a fictitious thing.

16th July.

To-day I witnessed some phenomena which disturbed me greatly. I dined at the house of my cousin Madame Sablé, whose husband commands the 76th Chasseurs at Limoges. The other guests were two ladies and a Doctor Parent, the husband of one of them. Doctor Parent devotes himself to maladies of the nerves and the extraordinary manifestations, to which the modern experiments in hypnotism and suggestion give rise. He recounted to us at some length the marvellous results, which have been obtained by English investigators and the Nancy Medical School. The incidents he mentioned seemed to me so preposterous that I flatly declared myself incredulous.

" We are," he proclaimed, " on the verge of discovering one of the most important of nature's secrets, that is to

say, of nature's terrestrial secrets, for there are undoubtedly other mysteries of the stellar universe, which are of the utmost importance. Ever since mankind has learnt to think and to express his thoughts in speech and writing, he has felt the hovering presence of a mystery, which his senses are too gross and imperfect to enable him to divine. He is now endeavouring through the medium of his intelligence, to make up this deficiency, which is due to the inadequacy of the organs of the senses. As long as man's intelligence remained in its rudimentary stage, these intimations of the invisible manifested themselves in terrifying phenomena of the crudest description. Hence arose the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of prowling spirits, of fairies, gnomes and ghosts; even I may add, the legend of God, for our conceptions of the unknown Creator, from whatever religion they are derived, are undeniably the most commonplace, the most stupid, the most unconvincing products of the panic-stricken brains of created beings. There was never a truer word than that saying of Voltaire's: 'God made man after His own image and man returned the compliment'. It is a little more than a century since mankind obtained a first inkling of these new developments. Mesmer and several others have opened out to us an unexpected pathway and we have achieved astonishing results, especially during the past four or five years."

My cousin, who was as incredulous as myself, smiled sceptically; whereupon Doctor Parent said:

"Would you like me to try to put you to sleep?"

"Yes, certainly."

She seated herself in an armchair, and the doctor proceeded to direct upon her a concentrated and mesmeric gaze. The sight of this induced in me a sudden uneasiness. My heart beat faster, and I felt a constriction of the throat. I saw Madame Sablé's eyes grow heavy; her lips contracted, and her bosom rose and sank. In ten minutes she was asleep.

"Go behind her chair," said the doctor.

I took a seat behind her. He put into her hands a visiting card.

"This," he said, "is a looking-glass. What do you see in it?"

"I see my cousin," she answered.

"What is your cousin doing?"

"He is twisting his moustache."

"And now what is he doing?"

"He is taking a photograph out of his pocket."

"Whose photograph?"

"It is a photograph of himself."

It was true, and that photograph had been delivered to me only that evening at my hotel.

"Describe the photograph."

"He is standing up. He is holding his hat in his hand."

Apparently she saw in this blank card the reflection she would have seen in a mirror.

The other women present were frightened and exclaimed:

"That's enough. That's enough."

The doctor however continued:

"To-morrow," he ordered, "you will get up at eight o'clock. You will call on your cousin at his hotel, and you will beg him to lend you five thousand francs. Your husband has asked you for this sum and you are to produce it when he returns to Paris."

Then he awakened her.

On my return to the hotel, my mind was busy with this curious séance. I had no doubt of the absolute and unimpeachable good faith of my cousin, whom I had known like my own sister from childhood. What I did suspect was some possible trickery on the part of the doctor. Had he held, concealed in the palm of his hand, a mirror and shown it to the sleeping woman simultaneously with the visiting card? Professional conjurers do feats which are, after their own fashion, quite as extraordinary. I went to bed, and to sleep, and was awakened on the following morning, that is to say, early to-day, by my

valet, who announced that Madame Sablé wanted to see me immediately. I hurriedly dressed myself to receive her.

She seemed in great distress, and did not raise her eyes to mine. Taking a chair, and without lifting her veil, she said :

" My dear cousin, I have a great favour to ask of you."

" What is it? "

" I hate telling you and yet I must. I want five thousand francs. I simply must have them."

" Surely not for yourself."

" Yes. It is for myself, or rather for my husband, who has ordered me to get this money for him."

I was so taken aback that I could hardly speak. I was wondering whether she were in league with Doctor Parent to make fun of me, whether the whole thing was not a hoax, which they had rehearsed beforehand and were now very cleverly acting. But when I looked more closely at my cousin, my doubts vanished. The proceeding was evidently most distasteful to her and was causing her great distress. I could see that she could hardly restrain her tears.

Knowing her to be wealthy, I said :

" It's odd that your husband can't lay hands on five thousand francs. Think again. Are you sure he ordered you to get the money from me? "

She hesitated a few moments, as though making a strenuous effort to search her memory. Then she replied :

" Yes. Yes. I'm quite sure."

" Did he write to you about it? "

Again she hesitated, and tried to remember. I could divine the painful struggle that was going on in her mind. She could not answer my question. All that she knew was that she had to borrow five thousand francs from me on behalf of her husband. She took refuge in a falsehood.

" Yes. He wrote to me."

" When was that? You didn't mention it yesterday."

"I got his letter only this morning."

"Could you let me see it?"

"No, no. There were things in it, private, personal things. I . . . I burnt it."

"I gather that your husband has got into debt."

"I don't know," she replied, after some hesitation.

On this I declared abruptly:

"My dear cousin, the fact is that for the moment I haven't five thousand francs available."

She uttered a cry of anguish.

"Oh, oh, I implore you. Try to get them for me."

Her agitation was increasing. She clasped her hands as though in prayer. I could hear her voice break. She wept and stammered, tormented and overwhelmed by the irresistible command which had been laid upon her.

"I implore you," she repeated. "If you only knew the agony I am suffering. I positively must have the money to-day."

I took pity on her.

"I'll let you have it immediately. I give you my word."

"Oh how can I thank you?" she cried. "How kind you are."

"Do you remember," I asked her, "what happened yesterday in your house?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember that Doctor Parent put you to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Well, Doctor Parent ordered you to come to me this morning and borrow five thousand francs. At this moment you are only obeying his suggestion."

She considered this for a few moments. Then she replied:

"But don't you understand that it is my husband who wants the money?"

For a good hour I endeavoured to convince her, but my efforts were of no avail. After she had left me, I went at

once to see Doctor Parent. He was just going out. He listened to me with a smile.

"Now do you believe?" he asked.

"As if I could help it!"

"Let us go and see Madame Sablé."

We found my cousin dozing in a long chair. She was utterly worn out. The doctor felt her pulse, and looked at her for some time. He held his hand before her eyes, which gradually closed under the irresistible influence of his magnetic power. As soon as she was asleep, he spoke to her:

"Your husband no longer requires the five thousand francs. You may therefore forget that you asked your cousin to lend you the money. If he says anything about it to you, you won't understand."

Then he awakened her.

I took out my pocket-book.

"Here is the money you asked me for this morning."

She was so surprised that I could not press the point. I made an effort to recall to her memory what had passed between us, but she denied it vehemently, accused me of making fun of her and ended by showing signs of annoyance.

There it is. I am back in my hotel, so perturbed in mind by this experience that I have not been able to take my luncheon.

19th July.

Many persons to whom I have related this incident have laughed at me. What am I to think of it? A wise man would say, "Who knows?"

21st July.

I dined at Bougival and finished the evening at a riverside ball. In the last resort, all depends on place and environment. On the *Ile de la Grenouillière* it seems the height of absurdity to believe in the supernatural; but at

the top of Mont Saint-Michel? Or in India? We are terribly susceptible to the influence of our surroundings. Next week I shall return to my own house.

30th July.

I came home yesterday. All goes well.

2nd August.

Nothing of interest. The weather is superb. I pass my days in watching the Seine flow past.

4th August.

My servants are quarrelling with each other. They maintain that someone comes by night and breaks the glassware in the cupboards. The valet accuses the cook and the cook accuses the linen-maid, and the linen-maid puts the blame on the other two. Which of them is the culprit? It will take a clever man to discover.

6th August.

This time, at least, I am not mad. I have seen. With my own eyes I have seen. I can no longer doubt. I am still chilled to the very finger tips, panic-stricken to the marrow of my bones. I have seen . . . I have seen . . . At two o'clock, in broad sunshine, I was walking in my rose-garden, between the autumn rose-trees which are now coming into bloom. I stopped to admire a *géant des batailles,* which had three magnificent blossoms, and I saw, I saw distinctly, quite close to me, the stalk of one of those roses bent as though by an invisible hand. Then it was broken off, as though ghostly fingers had plucked it. The flower was raised into the air in just such a curve as a hand would have described in carrying it to the lips, and there it remained suspended, without visible support, floating in the clear atmosphere, a terrifying patch of red, only a few feet from my eyes. Aghast, I sprang forward to seize it. But my fingers encountered nothing. The rose had vanished. I was seized by furious anger against

myself. It was beyond all bounds for a serious and rational man to have such hallucinations. But was it really a hallucination? I went back to look at the stalk and found it immediately. It was between the two roses, which still remained on the tree, and it had been freshly broken. At this my mind was convulsed with horror. I am now convinced that I am haunted by an invisible being. I know it, as surely as I know that night follows day. The incubus absorbs water and milk, it can touch things, grasp them and move them from one place to another. Therefore, although invisible, it is material, and it dwells as I do, under this roof.

7th August.

I slept well. My mysterious visitor drank the water in my carafe, but did not disturb my sleep.

I wonder if I am insane. Walking along the river-bank, in the sunshine, I have felt doubts as to my sanity; not merely those vague suspicions that I used to have, but clearly reasoned doubts. I have seen mad people. There were some, who remained intelligent, lucid, and even unusually shrewd in the affairs of life, save on one point only. They would converse on all subjects with acuteness, subtlety and penetration. Then of a sudden their reason would touch upon the reef of their insanity and be battered to pieces, scattered to the winds. They foundered in that raging and terrifying ocean, full of rolling waves, mists, and sudden gusts of storm; the ocean of dementia.

I should have no doubt of my insanity, my absolute insanity, had I not retained full consciousness of my mental plight, had I not probed and analyzed it with perfect lucidity. Apparently, then, I am a sane man with a hallucination. Some unexplained disturbance has taken place within my brain, one of those disturbances which present-day physiologists endeavour to analyze and classify, and this trouble has fixed a deep gulf within my mind and in the logical sequence of my thoughts.

Similar phenomena can be noted in dreams, which carry us away into a country of the strangest phantasmagoria, which, however, do not astonish us, for this reason that the verifying apparatus, the controlling power in our brains, is in abeyance, whereas the imaginative faculty is wide awake and functioning actively. Is it not conceivable that one of the notes of my cerebral keyboard is out of action? As the result of some accident, men sometimes lose a portion of their memory; they are unable to recall proper names, or verbs, or numerals, or possibly, dates. It has been established by recent research that all the several departments of the mind are localized in special portions of the brain. What wonder then if my faculty of controlling these hallucinations of mine, should be temporarily paralyzed in me. Such were my reflections during my wanderings on the river-bank.

Everything was bathed in sunshine. The sun glorified the face of the waters; it inspired me with the love of all things, of life, of the swallows, whose darting flight is the delight of my eyes, of the riverside plants, whose quivering in the breeze is music to my ears. In spite of this sense of superficial enjoyment, however, I was penetrated by an inexplicable feeling of uneasiness. I could not rid myself of the conviction that some occult force was numbing my faculties, paralyzing my will, curtailing my walks, and even drawing me back to the house. I experienced that distressing impulse to return, which haunts one, when some loved one at home is lying on a bed of sickness, and one has a presentiment that an aggravation of his malady has supervened. I turned homewards convinced that some bad news, a letter or telegram, would be awaiting me. But there was nothing of the sort; and I felt even more discomfited and oppressed, than if I had had some new and fantastic vision.

The 8th August.

I have had a frightful night. My visitor does nothing definite, but he hangs about me, watching my movements,

obsessing me, dominating me. Working in this hidden way he is more terrible than if he manifested his invisible and persistent presence in supernatural phenomena. Still, I had some sleep.

9th August.

Nothing happened. But I am afraid.

10th August.

Nothing. But what of to-morrow?

11th August.

Still nothing. With these fears and thoughts ever torturing my mind, I cannot stay any longer in this house. I am going away.

12th August, 10 p.m.

The whole day long I have been trying to leave home, and I could not do it. I determined to accomplish this act of liberty, so easy, so simple,—to go out of the house, get into my carriage, drive to Rouen. And I found it impossible. Why?

13th August.

There are certain maladies that completely destroy the physical elasticity. One's energies are annihilated, one's muscles relaxed, one's bones become as soft as flesh, and one's flesh becomes as fluid as water. Such are the sensations I endure in my moral being, and they work in a strange and devastating fashion. I have lost all strength and courage. I have no dominion over myself; I do not even retain the power of exercising my own faculties. Someone else is in control. I merely carry out his orders.

14th August.

I am lost! My mind has become the chattel and serf of some other being; the chattel and serf! There is some one, who orders all my acts, all my movements, all my thoughts. I am reduced to nothing, a servile and terrified spectator of my own actions. If I want to leave the house, I can not do so, because he will not have it. So I must needs remain at home. He holds me down in my armchair! Trembling and distraught, I concentrate on the effort to rise to my feet, so that I may feel that I am once more my own master. And I cannot do it. I am rivetted to my seat, and my seat is rivetted to the ground, so that no force can move us. Then, all of a sudden, I feel a compulsion to go to the end of the garden and pick some strawberries and eat them. I am forced to go. And I obey. I pick some strawberries. I eat them. Oh, my God, my God! Is there indeed a God? If there be, deliver me, save me, succour me! Pardon! Pity! Grace! Save me! Save me! Oh, what sufferings I endure, what tortures, what horrors!

15th August.

It seems to me clear that my poor cousin was under the same sort of domination and possession, when she came to me to borrow five thousand francs. She was subject to an alien will, which entered into her like a second soul, parasitic and tyrannical. Is the world coming to an end? And the despot, who rules me, who is he? I cannot see him, I can know nothing of this prowling stranger of supernatural origin.

If it be true that invisible beings exist, how is it, that, since the origin of the world, these beings have never yet manifested themselves to others in the same definite manner as they have to me? I have never read anything which suggests the events which have occurred in my house. Oh!—if I could only leave it, run away from it,

escape, and never come back again. That would save me. But I have not the power to do it.

16th August.

I managed to escape to-day for two hours. I was like a prisoner, who discovers that the door of his dungeon is open. I had suddenly the sensation that I was free; that he was far away. I ordered my carriage to be made ready with all speed and I drove to Rouen.

Oh! what a joy it was to be able to tell the coachman to drive to Rouen, and to have the order obeyed. I stopped at the library to borrow Dr. Hermann Herestauss's great treatise on the unknown denizens of the ancient and modern world. And then at the very moment when I was stepping into my carriage, and about to say: "Drive to the station," another order came to my lips, and was forced from me in a cry so loud that the passers-by turned to look at me.

"Home!" I shouted, and crazed with misery, I fell back upon the cushions of my carriage. He had tracked me down; I was again his prisoner.

17th August.

Ah! what a night! what a night! And yet it seems to me that I have some cause to rejoice. I was able to read, until one o'clock in the morning. Hermann Herestauss, Doctor of Philosophy and Theogony, deals with the history and manifestations of all the invisible beings who haunt the human race or infest our dreams. He describes their origins, their domain, their powers. But not one of them resembles this incubus of mine. His writings suggest to me that ever since man has been able to think, he has had a terrifying presentiment of the coming of a new being, stronger than himself. This being is to be man's successor upon earth. The human race has felt the approach of its master and, unable to foresee his nature, has in its terror created the whole fantastic world

of occult beings, vague phantoms, the offspring of man's fears. Having read Herestauss until one in the morning, I went and sat by my open window, in order to freshen my brain in the cool night breeze. The air was balmy and soothing. In happier circumstances, how I should have enjoyed a night like this.

There was no moon. The stars were twinkling in the depths of the dark firmament. Who were the inhabitants of these worlds, I wondered. What forms, what living creatures, what animals, what plants, would one find there? If there are men with the power of thought in those distant spheres, what knowledge have they that is denied to us? What powers that we do not possess? Can they see objects, of which we do not not suspect the existence? Some day or other, will not one of those beings traverse space, to appear on this earth, to conquer it, as the Normans once upon a time crossed the sea to conquer weaker races? So feeble, so helpless to protect ourselves, so ignorant, so puny, are we who inhabit this particle of mud, revolving in a drop of water. Thus reflecting I fell asleep, with the cool air of night all about me.

I had been sleeping for about forty minutes when I was awakened by strange, confused emotion. Without stirring, I opened my eyes. At first I saw nothing, but suddenly I had an idea that a page of the Herestauss, which I had left on the table, was turning over of its own accord. There was not a breath of air coming in at the window. I watched in amazement. After about four minutes I saw,—yes, with my own eyes I saw—a second page rise, turn over, subside upon the preceding page, exactly as if a human finger had turned the leaf. My armchair was to all appearance empty, but I realised that he was there; he, seated in my place, and reading. I made a furious leap, like the spring of a rebellious, wild beast about to disembowel its tamer. I crossed the room; intending to seize him, strangle him, kill him. But before I reached the chair, it was knocked over, as though someone had fled before me. The table rocked, the lamp

upset and went out, and the window was closed, as if some robber taken by surprise had hurled himself through it into the darkness, and seizing both sides had slammed them to, behind him.

So then, he had run away. He was afraid, afraid of me. That thing, afraid of me!

Why, then,—why, then—to-morrow, or some other day, I might perhaps manage to seize him, and dash him to bits on the ground. Dogs have been known to turn on their masters, bite them and worry them to death.

18th August.

All day long I have been thinking, and this is the scheme I have devised. I shall continue to obey all his orders, to do as he directs, act as he wills me. I shall show myself humble, submissive, craven. He is stronger than I. But the hour will come . . .

19th August.

Now I know. I know all. I have just read the following paragraph in the *Revue du Monde Scientifique*:

" We have received a curious communication from Rio de Janeiro. At this moment, in the Province of San Paolo, an epidemic of insanity is raging. It resembles the epidemics of contagious dementia, which afflicted the European peoples in the Middle Ages. The inhabitants, driven to distraction, quit their habitations, desert their villages, abandon their work in the fields, declaring that they are pursued, possessed, and tyrannized over, as if they were cattle. Their tormentors are beings, who are tangible but not visible. They are, seemingly, a species of vampire, which sucks the vitality of its sleeping victim. In addition to this, they drink water and milk, but appear to avoid every other form of nourishment. Professor Don Pedro Henriquez, accompanied by several doctors skilled in research, has left for the Province of San Paolo, in order to study on the spot the origins and mani-

festations of this amazing mania. He will in due course bring before the Emperor proposals for such measures, as are, in his opinion, calculated to restore the stricken population to reason."

Ah! Ah! Now I remember. I remember that beautiful, Brazilian three-master, which sailed up the Seine on the 8th of May, passing close under my windows. It looked so gay and white and trim. And the Being was on board of her, on his way from Brazil, where his race has its origin. He must have caught sight of me. He must have seen my house, which is white like his ship, and have jumped from the ship on to the bank. Oh, my God! I can now see into the future. The reign of man is over.

He is come; he, whom the early and unsophisticated races of the world associated with their first emotions of terror, he, whom anxious priests exorcised, whom sorcerers invoked in the darkness of the night, though unable as yet to compel his appearance; he, whom the anticipation of the temporary masters of the world invented with every conceivable form, whether monstrous or gracious, as gnome, spirit, genie, fairy, or goblin. The gross imaginings of primitive terror having passed away, men of greater perspicacity arrived at a clearer idea. Mesmer divined it, and medical research discovered and established the nature of the new power, ten years before its advent. This mysterious dominion over the human soul, which is thereby reduced to a state of bondage, is the weapon of our future Lord and Master, and the doctors of medicine have been playing with it, calling it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion, and what not. I have seen them amusing themselves like reckless children with this horrible power. Woe unto us, woe unto mankind! for he has come, the . . . the . . . what is his name? . . . the . . . I have a feeling that he is calling out his name to me and I can not catch it . . . yes . . . he is calling it . . . I listen . . . I cannot . . . say it again . . . the . . . Horla . . . yes . . . I have heard it . . . the Horla . . . it is he, the Horla . . . he has come.

Alas! the vulture has eaten the dove, the wolf has eaten the sheep, the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo; man has slain the lion with arrow, sword and powder; but the Horla will treat man, as man has treated the horse and the ox. By the mere exercise of his will-power, he will convert man into his chattel, his slave, his food. Woe unto us!

Sometimes, nevertheless, an animal rebels against his tamer and kills him . . . that is my own intention . . . but first I must study him, establish contact with him, see him.

Savants say that the eyes of animals are not as ours and that they have a different method of perception. It is true that my eyes cannot distinguish this newcomer, who lords it over me. Why not, I wonder.

I recall the words of the monk at Mont Saint-Michel. "Do you imagine that we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Consider for example the wind, which is the greatest of the forces of nature. It knocks men down, it demolishes houses, it uproots trees, it stirs up the sea into mountainous waves, it breaks away the cliffs and drives great ships on to the rocks. The wind whistles, groans, bellows, sometimes it even kills. Have you seen it? It exists nevertheless."

And I reflected further. The human eye is so feeble and imperfect that it cannot distinguish even solid bodies, if they happen to be transparent. If a glass without a background of tin-foil happens to be in my way, my eyes will betray me, just as a bird, which has flown into a room, will dash its head against the window panes. There are a thousand things besides, which deceive and delude the sight. What wonder then, if my eyes fail to perceive a new body through which the light passes freely?

A new being? Why not? It was inevitable. And if we are unable to distinguish this new being, just as we failed to discern those who were created before us, the reason is that his nature is more perfect than ours, that his body has finer qualities and is more cunningly con-

trived. The human frame is such a puny thing. Clumsily conceived, it is one mass of organs that are always jaded, that are always collapsing like unduly complicated springs. We live like plants and beasts, deriving our sustenance laboriously from air, vegetation and flesh. Ours is an animal mechanism, subject to maladies, deformities, putrefaction; we are an inadequate machine, unregulated, childish, grotesque, constructed with perverse ingenuity, a work both clumsy and delicate, a mere embryo of a being that might develop into something intelligent and sublime.

There are a certain number of species on this earth, few enough, to be sure, ranging from mollusc to man. Why should not another variation arise after the completion of the period, which separates the successive appearances of the various species? Why not indeed? Why not other trees, with great dazzling blossoms, trees that could fill a whole country-side with their fragrance? Why should there not be other elements, as well as fire, air, earth and water, the parents and fosterers of everything that lives? They are only four in number. What a pity it is! Why should there not be forty, four hundred, four thousand of them?

How poor and paltry and wretched the whole creation! Doled out parsimoniously, contrived without imagination, clumsily constructed. The elephant, the hippopotamus, what grace! The camel, what elegance!

But on the other hand, you will point to the butterfly, that winged blossom. I dream of one as big as a hundred worlds, with wings of such form and beauty, such colour and movement, that I cannot give you even a faint idea of its splendour. But I can see it, as it flits from star to star, while the delicate, rhythmic beating of its pinions diffuses a balmy fragrance. And the dwellers of the stars, in ecstasy and ravishment, watch it fly past.

. . . . .

What has befallen me? It is he, he, it is the Horla who haunts me and fills my mind with these insane imaginings.

He lives within me, his soul and my soul are becoming one. But I will kill him.

19th August.

I will kill him. I have seen him. I was seated last night at my table, making a pretence of concentrating on what I was writing. I knew that he would come prowling round me, close to me, so close, that I might be able to touch him, or even get him into my clutches. And then I would use every resource that a desperate man has at his disposal; hands, knees, chest, head; I would strangle him, crush him, bite and rend him.

With all my senses feverishly excited, I waited and watched. I had lighted two lamps, as well as the eight candles on the mantelpiece, as though the brilliant illumination could reveal him to me. In front of me stood my bed, an old oaken four-poster. On the right was the fireplace, on the left the door, which I had carefully closed, after leaving it open for a sufficient time to attract him to my room. Behind me was a very lofty wardrobe with a glass door. I always shave and dress before this mirror, and lately I had fallen into the habit of stopping whenever I passed it, and examining myself from head to foot.

I knew that the Horla was spying on me, as I on him. To deceive him, I went on making a pretence of writing. Suddenly I became aware, beyond all doubt, that he was looking over my shoulder, reading. I could feel a light contact on my ear.

I rose to my feet and stretched out my hands, turning so quickly that I nearly overbalanced. And what happened then? The room was as bright as daylight. Yet I could not see myself in my mirror. The reflecting surface was blank, clear, deep and shining, but my image was not there, although I was standing right in front of the glass. I scrutinized the gleaming surface from top to bottom. I looked at it aghast. But I durst not go nearer; I feared

to make the slightest movement. Although I was conscious that the invisible body, which had annihilated my reflection, was within my reach, I knew that he would again elude my grasp.

My terror was indescribable. And then, gradually, my image began to appear within the mirror, as though breaking through the mist that lies upon a sheet of water, drifting slowly from left to right. Every moment my reflection gained in clearness. It was like the passing of an eclipse. This veil that obscured my reflection, had no sharply defined contours; it was vague, semi-opaque and gradually yielded to complete transparency. Presently I was able to distinguish all the details of my person, as clearly as in everyday life.

I had seen the Horla. The terror of that vision abides with me, and I shudder with the horror of it.

20th August.

To kill him. Yes. But how, when I cannot lay hands on him? I might try poison, but he would see me mixing it in the water. And in any case, would our poisons take effect on an imperceptible body? None at all, I fear. Is there no other way?

21st August.

I have summoned a locksmith from Rouen. I have ordered him to fit the windows of my room with iron shutters, such as you see on the ground floor of private mansions in Paris, to keep out thieves. He is also making an iron door for me. I shall be taken for a coward, but what do I care?

10th September.

Hotel Continental, Rouen. It is done. It is done. But have I really killed him? My mind is utterly overwhelmed by the horrors I have witnessed. Yesterday, after the locksmith had put in the iron door and shutters, I left

them open until midnight, although it was getting cold. Then I had a sudden conviction of his presence, and I was filled with joy, a delirium of joy. I rose unconcernedly from my chair and walked carelessly about my room. After I kept this up for some time, so as to avoid arousing his suspicions, I calmly removed my boots and put on a pair of old slippers. Then I closed the iron window-shutters, and lounging with assumed nonchalance across the room, I double-locked the iron door. Then I strolled back to the window, fixed a padlock on it, and put the key in my pocket.

At that moment I had a sudden conviction that the Horla was hovering about me in a state of agitation. It was now his turn to be afraid. He was ordering me to open the door and let him out, and I came within an ace of yielding. However, I withstood him manfully, set my back against the panels and opened it just enough to allow myself to slip out backwards. I am very tall, and the crown of my head touched the lintel of the door-way. I was convinced that he had not had a chance of escaping from the room. And I locked him in, all by himself. Imagine my relief! I had him fast! Then I ran downstairs to the drawing-room which was exactly under my bedroom. I took two lamps and emptied the oil all over the carpet and the furniture. Then I set fire to it, and I escaped from the house, after having double-locked the massive front door. Going to the far end of the garden, I hid myself in a clump of laurels. And then a long time, a very long time elapsed. Everything was dark, silent, motionless. There was not a breath of air, not a star. Overhead were massed great banks of cloud. I could not see them, but I could feel them weighing heavily, heavily, on my soul.

With my eyes fixed on the house, I waited. The delay seemed interminable. By this time I was convinced that the fire had gone out of itself, or that the Horla had extinguished it. At last the fire burst through one of the lower storey windows, and a long tongue of red and

yellow flame shot out. Languid, caressing, it glided up the white wall of the house until it licked the roof. The reflection of the flame darted through the tree that shaded the house, illuminating the leaves and the branches, and I will swear that with it came a shudder, a shudder of fear. The birds awoke. A dog began to howl. It was like sunrise.

Presently two other windows fell out, and I could see that the whole lower storey of my house was nothing less than a raging furnace. Then a horrible, shrill shriek rent the air, the shriek of a woman. Two attic windows were thrown open. I had forgotten about my servants. I saw their frantic faces, their arms waving for help. Distraught by this horrid spectacle, I ran towards the village, shouting:

"Help, help! Fire, fire!"

Meeting some men, who were already hurrying from the village, I went back with them to the house, which by this time was simply a pyre, magnificent but horrible, a pyre of monstrous size, illuminating the whole earth, a pyre, in which human beings were being consumed. And with them the Horla! The Horla! My prisoner! The new Being! Man's new master! The Horla!

The roof-beams gave way and the whole roof crashed in. A volcano of flame shot up to heaven. Through the hollow window-frames I saw a raging crater of fire. The Horla is there, I thought. He is in that furnace. He is dead.

Dead? Was that so certain? Might it not be that that transparent body of his was invulnerable by forces that are fatal to the human frame? Suppose he had not been destroyed? It may be that time is the only power that can affect him, that has sway over that invisible and terrible Being. Why should he have been endowed with this transparent, mysterious, ethereal body, if there was any need for him to be afraid of illness, wounds, infirmities, or premature destruction?

Premature destruction? All one's fears for humanity

are based on that dreadful possibility. After man, the Horla. After man, who may die any day, any hour, any minute, by any sort of accident, comes that Being, who can die only at the appointed day, hour and minute; who can die on this account alone, that his time-limit has run out.

No. No. I have not killed him. That is a certainty. And it follows, that there is nothing left for me but to kill myself.

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